STUFFED CLUBS

And

ANTIMACASSARS

Revised Edition

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TO MY CHILDREN

“We must respect the past, remembering that once it was all that was humanly possible.”

--George Santayana

Foreword

This is the account of the founding of Fairbury, a little town of Livingston County, Central Illinois.

The tales are not intended as solemn history but for pleasure, and to show that, if parents are people, so are grand-parents, and their fathers and mothers before them. They hustled for a living, paid their taxes, worried about their children, had their fun and their troubles. They were real.

The story begins with one man's project for his farm just before the Civil War; and it ends with the century, when electricity and the automobile changed the pattern of family life.

I leave my story there. Anyone desiring to ascertain what man was candidate for a political office, or how many tons of coal were mined during a given year, is respectfully referred to any of the three histories of Livingston County.

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CHAPTER I
Fire and Feud

In the period immediately following the Civil War, the village of Fairbury, Illinois, held the distinction of being one place where no company would insure any property.

The town was riddled by factions. The citizenry enthusiastically took sides on every conceivable subject. Not only did the partisanships of the war still flame, but the saloon crowd was against the "drys"; the townspeople against the farmers and the railroad men; the Republicans against the Democrats; Catholics against Protestants. The latter themselves were divided into Methodists, Presbyterians and "Hardshell Baptists", and each of these was prepared to defend instantly its differences of creed among themselves, as well as against all outsiders; but the feud that completely split the town, regardless of sex, age, religion or political belief, stemmed from a private quarrel between two business men and progressed to the point where the whole of Fairbury was involved, and each faction earnestly tried to burn down the town.

In sober fact, Fairbury, almost from its inception, was founded in feud.

Caleb Patton owned a farm where the east part of Fairbury now stands. It was out in the middle of nowhere in the swamps of the prairie. The grass grew taller than a horse's back, and the mud was thick and deep. Wheat for the scanty sprinkling of settlers was ground into flour at Ottawa; their grain had to be hauled to Chicago to be sold; and for some time, their mail, if any, could be called for at Bloomington. Anything resembling a settlement was at Avoca, on the banks of the Vermillion River, five miles north.

When Patton heard that the builders of the new Peoria and Oquawka Railroad (later to become the Toledo, Peoria and Warsaw) were headed in his direction, he hunted up the Chief Construction Engineer, Octave Chanute, and made him a little dicker: If Chanute would influence the stockholders in his railroad to run the line through Patton's farm, he would give him half of the town site. Chanute agreed, and swung his end of the deal. Patton happily laid his farm out into lots, presenting four to his Baptist church, and another suitable space to the railroad for a depot; and then for some

obscure but hopeful reason, that chunk of lonesomeness was named “Fairbury”.

The response to his invitation to buy lots was immediate. Some of the inhabitants of Avoca foresaw their death sentence in having been by-passed, and began hauling away their houses on wagons to the new location before the tracks reached there.

The Abel Filley residence, one of the oldest houses in Fairbury, still stands at 110 West Maple street. The rear portion of the building was one of the houses hauled down from Avoca, and the front part was added in 1869.

COPY OF PHOTO CAPTION: The Abel Filley residence, one of the oldest houses in Fairbury, still stands at 110 West Maple street. The rear portion of the building was one of the houses hauled down from Avoca, and the front part was added in 1869.

They made a very small cluster of houses, but it was a cluster, just the same, what with new ones a-building, and there was a city limits to the place. In a short time when Chanute’s construction gang reached there, he was met by a delegation of founding fathers, who informed him they had passed an ordinance whereby no railroad tracks were to go through the town. Instead, it would be nice if they went around.

Work on the railroad was slow, being done by gangs of labourers grading with teams of oxen. Chanute was operating on a shoestring, for it was not until railroads had pushed farther west and proved their worth, that the capitalists became more generous with their money. He had economized on every inch of track, and a couple of unexpected miles more of it, together with a new right-of-way to be

bought, would amount to calamity.

He also was accountable to his stockholders. They had permitted him to enter into this agreement, and Patton had shown good-will by his donation of the depot site, and now the inhabitants of this minuscule hamlet, of which he owned one-half, were bent on making a monkey out of him.

One of the first laws passed by the new Illinois legislature had provided that if a railroad got its rails down without opposition, the rails stayed down. Of course it was sometimes necessary to convince the other fellows with clubs, but those early railroads were not built by weaklings. Octave Chanute tried to enforce his agreement with Patton, but every time he stuck a rail across the town line, he encountered a delegation of armed guards. They stayed right there, too, with their shotguns handy, while one of their citizens jumped on his horse and rode hell-for-leather to Pontiac, which had recently graduated from a sawmill to the county seat, to get an injunction.

Chanute's rage at the situation is completely understandable, but the reasoning of the townspeople is considerably less clear. Foremost in their minds, of course, was the fact that the lunatic appropriations of the first Illinois legislature in behalf of the railroads, had beggared the state and its settlers for twenty long years, and the money, squandered, had come to very little.

Furthermore, a number of the citizens were Easterners, and they had brought with them the ideas popular at the time, which were much encouraged by the stage and canal barge lines, that the reckless speed of those infernal machines, which even reached as high as thirty miles an hour, not only would menace the life and limb of a passenger, but also the view of trees and houses flashing past was certain to damage his eyes and produce insanity. Besides that, they reasoned, what would keep the engines from leaping the tracks and running wild among innocent children and livestock?

Of course, somebody in Fairbury may have sensed an opportunity to make a handsome profit by the proposed change of route, but, naturally, this was not mentioned, at least publicly.

At that time, money was extremely scarce in Illinois, and not one share of Peoria and Oquawka Railroad stock was ever sold in Fairbury, although the town did scrape up enough funds, finally, to

build a depot. They had to put the thing on stilts to get it out of the mud.

In the face of this sort of public opinion, Chanute was clever. He did not use force, but quietly laid his rails to the eastern edge of the town, skipped Fairbury, began again at the western edge, and worked straight on until Saturday night. In the darkness and secretly, he moved his crews back; and then the next morning, at first dawn, and reinforced by armed guards of his own, he was ready for business. To the consternation of the dumbfounded and helpless villagers, he rushed the track straight through the town and ran a locomotive over it to make it legal. It was Sunday and the courthouse was closed. By Monday morning, he was well on his way.

Chanute finished his railroad that year, and lived to enjoy years of wealth. Later he further proved his prophetic wisdom in new-fangled ideas by becoming one of the backers of the Wright Brothers. Chanute Air Force Base at Rantoul, Illinois, was named for him.

Thus it was, that progress gave the dwellers of Fairbury a boost in spite of themselves, and under that impetus, during the first winter, they built themselves a grain elevator and a general store. When spring came, a dry goods store started competition. A small hotel followed, then two boarding houses, grocery store, drug store, wagon making and repair shop, tavern, lumber yard and Methodist church.

It was the next year, 1859, when John Marsh bought eighty acres of land adjoining Patton's on the west, and had it surveyed for an addition to the town. He then caused much excitement by going against mining tradition to bore for coal in the open prairie, but he did discover a substantial vein of good quality. Bat Masterson worked for Marsh in this mine for several years before he went on to Dodge City and became a famous United States Marshal. He was remembered because, unlike the other miners, he was always well dressed and quiet mannered.

The mines brought real prosperity, for it gave the settlers a cheap fuel and supplied the railroad as well. Heretofore, their engines had burned wood cut from the forests, but the supply was fast vanishing.

Because of the mines, other railroad business came to Fairbury,

and the merchants were glad to get it, until they discovered that it was hard to collect payment. After pressing matters legally, they attached everything belonging to the poverty-ridden railroad, even going so far as to garnish freight bills before they were collected, and finally forced it into bankruptcy.

The railroad men cherished their grievances, got drunk and did everything possible to annoy the people, who considered it simple justice when they retaliated. For ten years both factions pestered the other in every way imaginable, until that freight train went through town.

For this occasion the engineer had it fired up heavily before before reaching the settlement, and it whizzed through, belching enormous black clouds of smoke and live cinders. It had been a hot, dry fall, and the wind was blowing, and the sparks that fell on the East End elevator burst into ready flames.

When the engineer reached Forrest, his next stop six miles away, he looked back at the pall of smoke over Fairbury, and remarked with satisfaction that he had “set the whole damn town on fire”.

As a matter of fact, he very nearly had. The business section of East Fairbury was wiped out, and a number of the homes went with it.

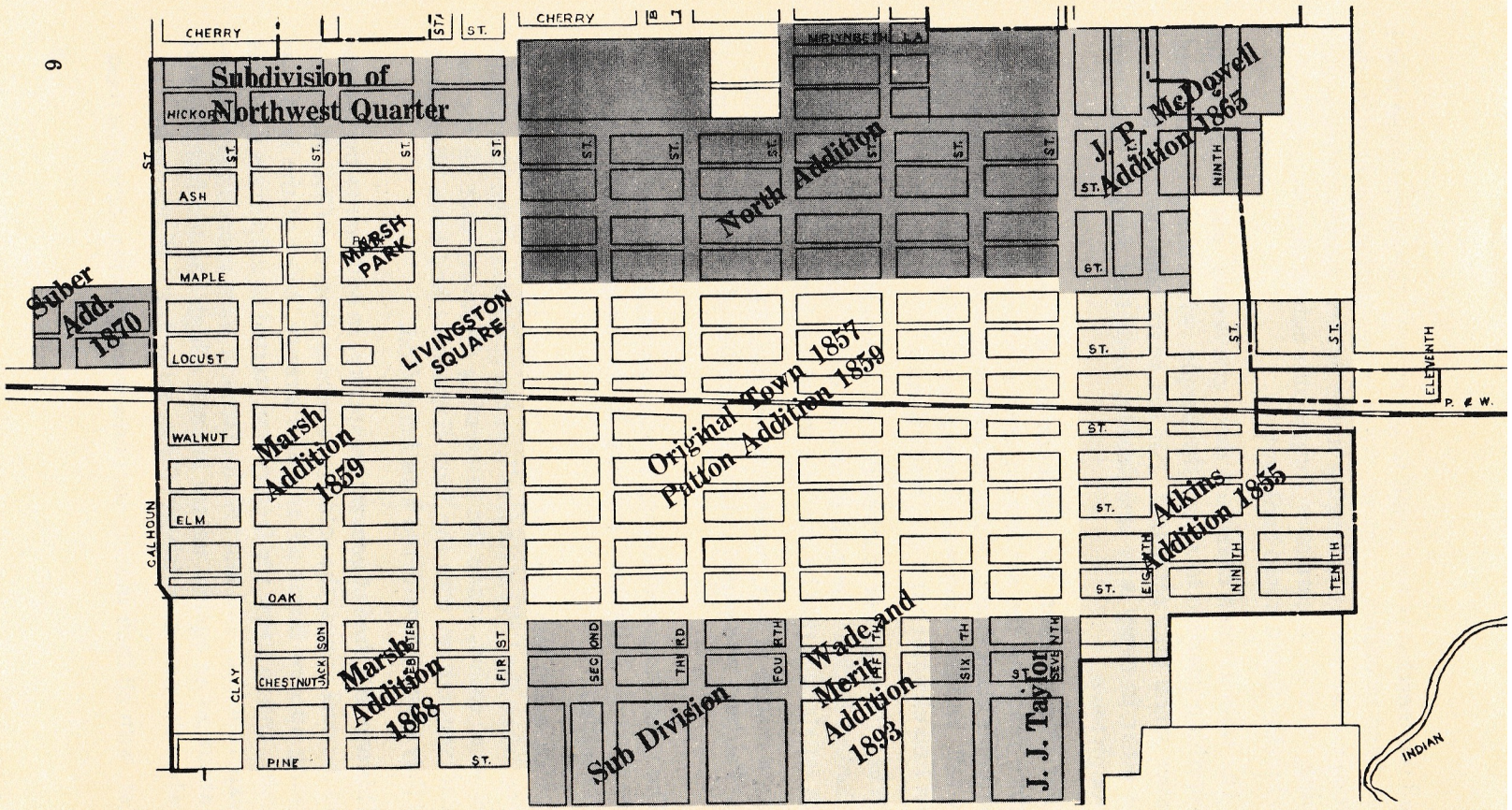
The stores began rebuilding at once, and suits against the railroad were started. They were pending in the courts for six years, but never settled.

It took much less time, in fact the ashes from the fire were still warm, when the “West Enders”, as the residents of the Marsh addition were called, made the interesting discovery that all the cut-throat competition with the East End stores had been eliminated, and they piously considered it an Act of God.

This was at a time of general prosperity. In addition to the income from the coal mines, the soldiers returning from the Civil War were opening up new farms all around Fairbury. Most of the land was marshy, and so a new tile factory was started to help drain it. It was all experimental, and most of the farmers were exceedingly skeptical about going against nature in such a high-handed fashion, and so, when the next drought beset them, some dug it all out again.

Yet, with all their indecision, crops were growing, being harvest-

REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENTS TO 1900



The original town site with additions, 1857-1870.

MAP OF ADDITION

ed, and hauled into town to sell, and Marsh set about to capture the business in a big way. He bought three-hundred acres adjoining his original tract and began work to make everybody else look like pikers.

His part of town he located around two squares. One was donated to the city for recreation purposes, and it was to be called Marsh Park. He considered the lots around this to be choicer, and they were correspondingly higher priced, in spite of the fact that the park was under water every time it sprinkled. (The Catholic Church located not far north of this.)

The other park he named Livingston Square, and it was to be the market place. The water tower stands there now. On the south side of this he built his Arcade Block, a series of one story red brick buildings, simple and beautiful in design, with fan lights above the doors, and large show windows. These buildings housed two saddle and harness shops, a gun and sporting goods store, a poultry house, a drug store, and the Fairbury Marble Works which made monuments for the local cemetery. Later on they had a bedspring factory there.

With enticements like this, he persuaded the McDowells to build on the north side of Livingston Square. The McDowell Block housed their dry goods and hardware stores, and bank. The second story, which formed one large room, they named McDowell Hall, and declared it available for recreation purposes.

Furthermore, Marsh captured the post office for his town. That was on the east side of Livingston Square in the back of Ramsey's drug store. A restaurant opened next door to it, on the Main Street corner, with Walton's grist mill across the street.

Finally, in 1866, Marsh crowned the whole of his achievements by building the Livingston Hotel. It was a large, two-story frame building in "Central Park", and a part of the lower floor was used as a depot and waiting room for travelers. It cost $17,000, and was known far and wide as the only hotel in Central Illinois which had running water.

All this construction work made the modest rebuilding over in the East End seem very insignificant. Patton had sold out his real estate holdings, and now it was Wallace Amsbary who was one of the leading citizens of the East End. He owned a part interest in a grocery

store there.

Whatever started that famous feud is now forever lost. It must have been a trivial matter, or it surely would have been remembered, but under Amsbary's driving ambition, the East Enders went to work to match John Marsh, item for item. Marsh had a grist mill, and so they had one; ditto the dry goods, drug and grocery stores, and the grain elevators. They even decided to have a coal mine, too. Amsbary had to solicit Eastern capital for this, and import a group of Scotch miners who did the boring.

These miners are well remembered for their all-night Bobby Burns celebrations, but they gave an unexpected twist to the life of the community. They were well educated, but they scandalized the rest of the town because they were "Infidels", or "Free Thinkers". They were headed by Amsbary himself, and were a potent force. Their hall, when they took up a subscription to match the McDowell Hall, was dedicated to "Free Thought". The center of the arch over the stage carried the date of 94 instead of 1871 A.D., reasoning that it was 94 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The address of dedication was given by Robert Ingersoll, the well-known Peoria lawyer and agnostic. The society had no chairs for their audience, but the people ranged themselves on planks placed upon nail kegs. The place was jammed to the doors, and another crowd stood outside.

Ingersoll spoke there several other times, and then he was challenged to a debate on religion by Reverend Underwood, the president of Eureka College. Fairbury was chosen as their meeting place, and the townspeople put a big tabernacle, on the East Side, of course, as there was no building in town big enough to hold the crowd. Hundreds of people came to hear them, and both men out-did themselves in oratory. Both of them claimed the decision.

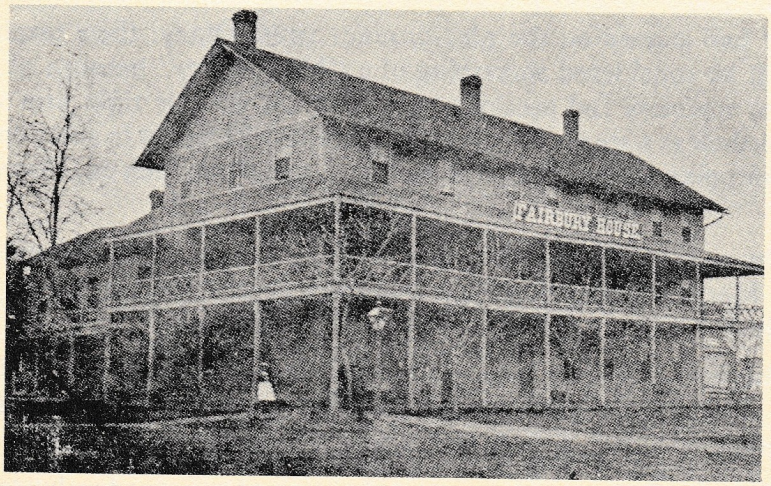
Now the East Enders may have been rubbing their hands with satisfaction over the building boom which had drawn them even with the West Siders, but their pleasure suddenly ceased with the arrival of a new railroad, the Chicago and Paducah, at the western boundary of the town.

However badly the Peoria and Oquawka had been treated, there was no doubt at all now about the people wanting the Chicago and Paducah road. It was to run from Strawn to Streator, and promised

to open up an entirely new territory. To the stupefaction of the Amsbary adherents, they discovered that Marsh had secretly used his influence to such effect that the new line was to come just within the city limits on his side of town, and then turn straight south toward Strawn. It was to bypass East Fairbury completely.

The construction gang reached the boundary on Saturday night. The president of the road was on hand, and Marsh and all his friends went up to McDowell Hall, where they had quite a party. The hangovers must have been terrific, because early next morning Amsbary and his friends slipped across into enemy territory and, aided by armed guards, laid the rails straight across town, where they were willing that it should then make the turn toward Strawn. They were not able to get hold of a locomotive to run over them until next day, but the rails stayed down, anyway.

To celebrate his victory, Amsbary build the "Fairbury House", and, mindful of the lush advertising of the elegant Livingston Hotel, with tongue in cheek, he called his the "Poorest Hotel In Illinois". Nearly a hundred years later, this was to earn it a place in Ripley's "Believe It or Not".



The Fairbury House, 1879, had forty-five well kept rooms. It was later known as the Thomas House, and stood on the S.W. corner of Fourth and Walnut (Paducah Avenue).

Like its rival, the Fairbury House used its ground floor for a ticket office and waiting room, bringing the number of depots in the hamlet to the magnificent number of three.

Any improvement, East or West, and of any sort whatever, was accompanied by bitter arguments, followed by fights. The town had already earned the “worst name” of any in this section of the country. One main reason was that there were then so many rough miners, the three mines having become the big industry. Because of them, all the stores and shops stayed open until ten o’clock at night, and the saloons stayed open, too.

Every night there were at least three or four rip-roaring, bloody fights in which the battlers did their best to knock each other to bits. Men seized on every possible pretext for arguments, and every fight piled fresh fuel on the hatred between the two sections of the town. Not one person was untouched. Even the little boys went to war. Their dividing line was Second Street, and heaven help the adventurous gamin who dared step over it without plenty of friends, and ammunition by way of clods and stones, to back him up.

The little West Enders finally conquered the territory over to Seventh Street, which crowded the other fellows considerably. The school house, however, was strictly neutral territory after one big fight had started on the play-ground. Smith Olney, their teacher, might be considered something of a “Miss Nancy,” because of his prissy manners and precious pronunciation, but his right arm was nevertheless a sturdy one. He settled their differences in short order by whipping every last one of the boys, and, from then on, that was that.

Thus it was, the deadly rivalry between the partisans of Amsbary and Marsh was running high when the fires started to break out again.

There had already been three extremely disastrous fires only a few months apart, and all three had been proven to be of incendiary origin.

With the first one, alone, a whole block of ten wooden business buildings and their contents burned to the ground; seven more with the next; and the third fire took four of the new brick buildings that they had erected after the Peoria and Oquawka locomotive blaze, together with the Amsbary and Jones grain elevator.

This had the East End business district pretty well cleaned out, and so, to the public, it seemed anything but accidental when someone poured kerosene over the piled benches and chairs in McDowell Hall, and set fire to them. It was discovered and extinguished, however, before much damage was done.

Now these, mind you, were only the spectacular blazes downtown. Added to all this was the horrible fact that every few nights someone's home was burned.

The people who remember the old fire bell testify that, quite aside from its sinister meaning, the tone of it was so deep and menacing that it made one's hair stand straight on end. Nobody ever went to bed without carefully arranging his clothes at hand so that they could be put on the instant it began to ring, because everybody went to all the fires.

Everybody pitched in and helped, even the children, because one never knew when one might need help himself.

The men and older boys took turns with the pumps of the fire engine, or, if it had been delayed getting through the muddy streets, they formed a human chain to pass the buckets of water to the others inside the burning building or on the roof. They carried out furniture and rescued livestock. The women helped fill and carry water buckets and salvage articles rescued from the fire. They put these at a safe distance from the flames, and the little girls patiently sat on the piles to keep them from being stolen.

It was a desperate time. Men went to bed reasonably prosperous and wakened to find themselves bankrupt. They passed each other on the streets and met in the few remaining places of business, each eyeing the others, and secretly wondering.

One lighter incident in all the trouble involved Andy Claudon, whose landlady accused him of attempting to set fire to her house, where he lived. He was arrested and brought to trial, and things looked black for him. He was engaged to Judge McDowell's daughter, who used her influence to get her father to defend him.

The fire in question had started from kerosene in the basement, and drops of it had been discovered along the stairs. The landlady maintained that he had brought it in the house for the purpose of setting the fire, but he swore, under oath, that he had only gone

down to fill some lamps, and had spilled a little on the way back.

When the trial opened, his lawyer, in his most majestic manner, focused the whole defense into the question of whether those spots legitimately went UP the stairs with the lamps, or whether the spots went DOWN the stairs for incendiary purposes; and, before they realized it, the jury were completely befuddled. They disagreed, and the young man was acquitted.

It was no wonder that the townspeople were so jittery, for they had no fire protection off Main Street.

When the alarm rang, the notes striking the number of the ward, the firemen would rush to the hose cart. The members of the company had trumpets and red hats, and there was always a lot of shouting and running around. Arrived at the scene of the fire, they would rip off the top of the household well, stick down the end of their hose, and begin to pump.

The hose cart had two wheels about five feet high and six feet apart. Its pump was on the shaft between the wheels, with the hose wound over it. It was a “two-way” affair: It pumped when it went down, and the water spurted again as it came back up, and the handles, which were removable, were laid along the shaft for transportation. The firemen, six on a side, took turns working the pump, but even their best efforts threw a stream of water less than fifty feet, and it could not reach the second story of a building. Often it turned to steam before it ever hit the blaze, but if the firemen were busy they felt that they were at least trying to save things. It was so much worse when the mechanism broke, or they found that the hose had frozen, due to lack of proper place to store it between times. Then the firemen just had to stand with the frantic property owner and simply watch things go up in smoke.

Down on Main Street, the villagers had what they, at first, considered to be the finest of fire protection, not having anticipated their disasters as coming wholesale.

The system was five wooden cisterns, one for each block, and each held 240 barrels of water. They were connected by pipes, so that, as they pumped from one, the water went down in all of them. Moreover, there was a well at each end of Main Street and another in Livingston Square, but when half of downtown was ablaze at once and everything had been pumped dry, it was just too bad, taxpayers

or no taxpayers.

By this time, Fairbury had earned its reputation of having had more disastrous fires then any other town in the Middle West, but more were yet to come. The grist mill that Amsbary had leased, burned, together with still more stores; and Amsbary, whose finances were desperate, became specific in his accusations that Marsh had instigated the setting of the fires.

Each faction had a newspaper among its other properties, each strongly partisan, naturally. Then, even more than now, it was the custom to write letters to the editors giving opinions and voicing grievances, and Amsbary cut loose in print. Marsh had no choice but to reply, even if he had wished to do otherwise, and letter retorted to letter, each one more virulent than the last.

The climax of the whole affair came with the burning of the pride of Fairbury, the elegant Livingston Hotel. The boys remembered this fire because the firemen, in their excitement, carefully carried the featherbeds downstairs, and then threw the bedroom crockery out the windows.

After this, the vituperation in the newspapers reached a new pitch. Both men specifically accused the other of arson, and both attempted to get indictments before the Grand Jury, and at the same time they started suits for alleged slander. Marsh was indicted but not convicted.

At last the citizens of both sides of town became utterly revolted by the continued display of bitter feeling. They called a joint mass meeting, and the resolutions they passed were a blistering rebuke.

“Resolved that such deeds are a blight upon our city and an infamous stain upon the characters of the perpetrators, instead of those they would defame; that we regard with horror and astonishment the actions of men, prostituting their official position to carry out personal spite against their fellow citizens at public expense; that we are utterly opposed to such persons, and believe such attempts to be the result of vindictive personal feeling generated by an old feud on the part of their enemies in the hope to shield themselves from damages in certain suits now pending against them in courts.”

Outwardly, at least, the town had got together, but the pains of their financial beating lingered until 1890, when the McDowells razed their building on Livingston Square and built anew on Main

Street. With that act, the old quarrel was really dead.

In contrast to their elders, the end of the war between the boys came almost at once. It was sudden and complete. The cause of it was a circus.

Circuses were pitifully few, anyway, and each one was a major event. They all came into town from the north in wagons, and the youths of the village rode all the way out to the DeMoss bridge to meet and escort them into town.

This particular one had animals with it, which was practically unheard of, and every boy who could earn, beg, borrow or steal the price of admission was there to get a good look at them, even though the tent was pitched in the middle of Livingston Square, which was West Side territory.

During the performance, the company put on an act which was so vulgar even that unaesthetic audience objected. Nobody ever really knew how the fight started, but, of course, the McDowell boys got the credit.

All at once that old circus battle cry, “Hey, Rube!” went up, and those seasoned circus roustabouts grabbed the weapon nearest at hand. From then on, it was entirely immaterial whether a boy lived on the East Side of Fairbury, or whether he lived on the West Side. That fight was a wonder. During the fray, the old animosities disappeared under the urgency of keeping their own necks from getting broken. After it was all over, the doctors had considerable patching to do, and it was said that one of the McDowell boys spent the next four days in bed.

When they were all able to be up and about again, they made the interesting discovery that, for them, if not completely so for their elders, the Great Feud was finished.

The Free - thought Hall, extreme right, and Commons, Circa 1873.

CHAPTER II
Developments

The amazing thing was that Fairbury, with all its embittered factions, was able to make any progress at all. Yet progress, it did. The 1860 census had listed 269 inhabitants, and there had been enough children to start a school.

Even to the soldiers returning to their homes, the town must have seemed unprepossessing. A little handful of frame houses appeared to have been flung down at random. Only four were in the whole northwest part of town. There were no lawns, no flowers, only the prairie grass and the weeds, with wagon tracks or a path here and there. A few of the more ambitious householders had little cinder paths to their doorways, and boards across the worst of the puddles.

At night the town remained in unbroken blackness, save for the faint candle gleam from a neighbor's far-off window, and families going out for the evening took a lantern with them. Women did not often venture out alone after night: there were too many drunks.

Nevertheless, the citizens were convinced that the town had possibilities.

The very first thing they were able to agree upon, feud or no feud, was their water supply to fight the downtown fires. The system had its drawbacks, however, and it became one of the duties of the mayor to listen to the complaints about the windmill which filled it. On breathless summer days, when everything was as dry as tinder and the city cisterns were empty, the harrassed businessmen, who had learned from experience what to expect by way of fires, would gather to jaw at the motionless wheel and all the members of the Village Board.

In winter they fretted lest the connecting pipes, buried underground, would freeze and render the whole system useless.

There was real irony in the fact that the City Fathers found it necessary to be concerned with cisterns, when there was an over-supply of water on the surface of the ground. The town was built on marshy land, and every time it rained the streets simply disappeared. Always, somewhere, there was mud. Mud: heavy, rich, black Illinois mud, that was to grow much bountiful crops. Mud:

where in the spring, horses floundered belly deep. Mud of the trails that summer dried into spine twisting ruts.

The gravel they tried on the streets at first, promptly sank out of sight with the first spring rains. Slack hauled from the mines, proved only a trifle more effective. Every able-bodied man in town over twenty-one years of age, either paid an annual poll tax of two dollars to the city treasury, or labored on village improvements; but it was a physical impossibility for them to build up all the streets at once, and so, into the mayor's suffering ears were poured the complaints. Each citizen argued that he was paying his hard earned money for taxes, and therefore, he was just as much entitled as the other fellow to have his mud hole filled.

The people were not even particularly grateful, after it was done, that the Uncle John Kring Lane, (the road north from Seventh Street), had been fixed to be passable, at least. That was the road to Avoca, and the people out in that direction had preferred to go ten more miles to Pontiac, rather than drive the shorter distance to Fairbury, and then bog down inside the very town itself. Four horse teams pulling empty wagons, stuck fast along the lane, and it had taken rocks to fill the road.

There were very few cellars in the early town, because they flooded to their ceilings several times a year, and thereby created spectacular opportunities for juvenile indoor boating.

Finally, the Village Board came to the conclusion that the only way they ever could make the town site liveable, would be to dig ditches and drain it. Just one of those ditches cost the taxpayers ten thousand dollars. This, mind you, was during a time when a copper penny had purchasing power in any store.

The ditches, running along one side of the street, were so deep that little boys went swimming in them in the summer time. They were also a traffic hazard. A citizen, wrestling with a team in the throes of a runaway, might be flung headlong into one, but he considered himself most fortunate if he did not have to get his horses and wagon, as well as himself, out of the steep and muddy banks.

There were bridges across the ditches, both for vehicles and pedestrians, and willow trees grew thick along the banks. They were beautiful and graceful, but their roots, greedily reaching out for moisture, matted so firmly as to impede the current, and held back

any refuse that had fallen into it. During the hot weather, this stagnant water was haven for mosquitoes, and the ditches became so befouled that they had to be cleaned periodically, and the refuse hauled away. Four hundred wagon loads of filth were taken out of them during one spring alone.

Although they provided effective drainage for the flooded cellars, it was a little awkward for the home owners who were thus cut off from the street; and so, at intervals over the ditches, there appeared "run-ups", a combination "stepping block" and foot bridge over the ditch. The high end was on the street side, so that the ladies might enter their carriages with propriety.

Once the streets had been drained and dried, it was possible to repair the chuck holes so that they would stay filled. Then, after that, the city planners were ready for the sidewalks. These board walks became a special point of civic pride, as the newspapers themselves were proud to note. After the mud and the cinder paths, walks seemed wonderful, and it was no small additional satisfaction to the citizens that the thirty miles of walks throughout Fairbury were far more than the neighboring town of Pontiac enjoyed.

To construct them two narrow boards were placed on edge to raise the walk above the ground, and then equal lengths of wider boards were nailed across. There were cracks between the boards, which made very efficient traps for any small objects dropped upon them. Small boys, and some not so small, spent hours upon their stomachs fishing them out. The plank lengths naturally divided the walk into sections, and annually, at Hallowe'en time, whole portions disappeared from their accustomed places. When it rained hard, the sidewalks floated until the flood subsided, and then had to be reanchored. In the meantime, they made wonderful boats for small adventurers.

Also, the walks being wooden caused them to be correspondingly fragile. A runaway horse, hitting them, sent the splinters flying; and the "Blade", the weekly newspaper of Fairbury, called attention to the numerous cows throughout the town that had been tethered too close to the walks, crushing them and covering them with blobs of manure. Conceivably, their owners intended them as weed mowers, for tough grass and weeds hung thick over the walks. The wild sweet clover was particularly disliked, in spite of its perfume, because of its special ability to catch the ladies' skirts.

There were one or two other minor disadvantages about the walks. In the winter time they creaked so noisily beneath their coating of snow, that anyone entertaining any notions of being clandestine must have been abashed. Footsteps, during sub-zero weather, sounded like a series of pistol shots. Hot weather, on the other hand, caused the knot holes to ooze rosin. These grew in size and hardened into big bumps, causing curious oddities of gait even in the cold sober. According to the town wits, it was impossible to tell, from appearance, if even a deacon of the church was not “three sheets in the wind”.

It was a very special point of town pride that these walks were kept in good repair. The city street commissioner, carrying a bucket of nails and a hammer, patrolled the walks, fastening down loose boards and replacing broken ones, and also the worn down planks that left nails and knot holes sticking up to stub a toe. The repair bill for only one year was over two-thousand dollars; but whenever the Village Board showed signs of becoming frugal and skimping on that part of the budget, there was always someone to remind them of the time Mrs. Rogers tripped and fell, breaking her leg. She sued the city and got fifteen-hundred dollars damages, thereafter proving to be no small impetus to civic progress.

Fairbury made more improvements downtown, too. There the walks had been built on piles three or four feet above the street to get them out of the mud. This facilitated descent from the carriages, and unexpectedly provided a catch-all for trash and convenient hiding place beneath them for boys. Once a skunk was cornered under there for several days, and created a divertisement.

At the end of each block the walks sloped down to the street crossings on planks placed lengthwise. the crossings themselves were long blocks of stone, six or eight inches high, and vehicles always jolted as they went over them. Since Main Street was churned hub deep most of the time, every wheel was a solid disk of mud. When they went over the stone crossings, the jar always knocked the mud out of the spokes. Oftentimes the chunks left there weighed seven or eight pounds and these had to be dug off every day. While he was downtown, Lafe Kring, the street commissioner for many years, was almost never seen without a shovel across his shoulder. When a surplus of mud had accumulated, he brought a

wagon and hauled it away to fill up some of the chuck holes around town.

Everyone preferred this thicker form of mud, because when the rains were heavy it would be thin, and the traffic splashed it across the walks and over everything within reach. By springtime, with all the manure droppings, the odor therefrom became terrific, but nothing could be done until dry weather came and the refuse could be shoveled up and carted off in wagons.

The upkeep of the wooden walks had become such a public burden by 1892, that the Village Board had an experimental brick walk laid on a coal slack bed. This is still extant, in various stages of interesting upheaval, on East Maple Street, but, before they could arrive at a decision about it, Doctor Brewer and some of his neighbors put in the first cement walk at their own expense. It was so sensational a success that many other people entertained the idea until they discovered the cost. They fell to such squabbling about the width of walk needed, and the amount to be spent, that nothing could be undertaken by the Village Board. It did, nevertheless, have a trial cement crossing laid on Main Street at the City Hall corner, to test the durability of the new stuff, but it was not until fifteen or so years later that new walks were put in all over town.

The village did have street lights, however. They were sixty-five kerosene lanterns set on bright red posts, and it cost seven-hundred dollars a year more of the taxes to keep them going. Most of the money went to the lamp lighter who made his rounds each night. He came back again in the morning, bringing his wheelbarrow loaded with a couple of cans of kerosene. Their spigots protruded from the side of the barrow to facilitate the filling of the lanterns, which was done after he had cleaned them. Sometimes he grew so weary of his task he left it unfinished, and then that night a part of the population had to walk in darkness.

Consequently, it was a jubilant citizenry when the newly invented electric lights reached practical development. In 1885, the Village Board had three lights put up on Main Street to test their usefulness. The poles were placed in pairs, one on either side of the street, and the electric light wires extended across it between them. A bulb hung in the center of the wire over the street, and it could be pulled down when it had to be replaced. They found the improvement on the old “smoke boxes” was miraculous. A single turn of the

switch eliminated the lamp lighter and his wheelbarrow, cans and cleaning rags; but it was five years before rival power companies could install them in private homes. Two companies claimed sole rights, and Fairbury very nearly had an electric light war to add to its list of troubles, before the Fosters got their plant built.

At this same time, the business houses of the town were also much improved. Livingston Square had shops on three sides of it and was open to the west. There were hitching racks around it in front of the stores, and a windmill stood in the middle to keep the horse troughs filled.

The remainder of the stores straggled along the north side of the five blocks that comprised Main Street. For the most part they were one-story wooden buildings with false fronts, with a house or two among them, and a few brick buildings.

Each business place had a wooden awning over the walk in front of it, which was supported by poles edging the street. This gave nearly complete coverage from one end of the district to the other in case of rain. There was an ordinance prohibiting the use of these poles as hitching posts, but every once in a while somebody would forget. A startled team would yank out a pole, and down would come a section of awning causing casualties among the pedestrians and loafers. The latter were especially thick along there on Sundays, when they would gather to whittle up the wooden boxes thrown out from the stores.

Nevertheless, however proudly a citizen of Fairbury might point to the north side of Main Street, he invariably squirmed with embarrassment when a stranger turned around in the opposite direction, and audibly wondered what ailed the place.

As before stated, the ground along the railroad tracks was low. It was so low that it was under water most of the time, and they called that pitiful pond the Commons. It was shunned for building purposes, because even on the north side of the street, which was a trifle higher, flooded cellars were too ordinary for comment.

Midway, and adjoining the tracks, sprawled Von Tobel's lumber yard. Their sheds, festooned with tattered circus posters, edged Main Street across from the stores, with a row of hitching racks along the side of the buildings, and a shallow ditch between. Like

the Commons, it was below street level and flooded after every rainstorm. It was always a favorite place for children to play, because they could use the floating pieces of lumber for rafts.

A grist mill stood down at the west end of Main Street, and a grain elevator at the east. There were a few hitching racks, intended to take care of the overflow of carriages and wagons in front of the stores; and, as if the place was not wet enough to begin with, there was a well and iron watering trough in every block. Each pump had an iron cup chained to it for the benefit of thirsty humans, for they had never heard of germs.

Several of these wells were open ones. They were cleaned out once in a while, but not until is seemed to be worth the trouble, and several wagon loads of filth could be taken out at one time. Occasionally a horse would fall into one of them, and then it needed a block and tackle to get it out. It was considered to be a real feat of engineering if the horse could be brought up uninjured. Anything smaller than a horse just fell in and drowned. Maybe it was discovered and fished out. Maybe not.

It was the Commons between Main Street and the railroad tracks that were the village dumping grounds. The grocers from across the street threw their banana stems, rotten fruit and vegetables there, but there were no tin cans. That was before the day of tin cans.

There were even times when the smell from the dump could be distinguished above that of the manure on the street. For that matter, the beautiful Arcade Block was perfumed, too; it had the poultry house. Furthermore, in the good old summer time, with a soft south wind blowing, the visitor fought for breath with a few more stinks added, for then they had the fumes from the depot privies, the gas from the mines, and the stench from the slaughter house, a mile out of town.

Under John Scibird, the Blade editor's, vigorous prodding, the poultry and slaughter houses were cleaned up, and a part, at least, of the trash was hauled away.

So it was, that several years passed before the citizens received a new, ever present smell they had to pay for, and about which they could do nothing.

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cisterns, had proudly instituted a water system for the town from the well in Livingston Square. It proved completely inadequate, and during the summer months there were frequent notices in the newspaper warning the property owners of the imposed limits regarding the use thereof.

Human nature being what it is regarding civic improvements, they might have managed to get along, nevertheless, except that the Arcade Block sank, caused by a mine tunnel running beneath. It was no sudden cave-in, but a gradual sinking. It was first noticed by a T.P. & W. engineer, for the drop had left one of his rails eight inches lower than the other. When he ran over it this time, there was such a movement along the train that he thought he had run off the track. He rushed back to investigate, discovered what had happened, and reported it at the station.

For several days the sinking caused great excitement throughout the town, because it was impossible to tell how much farther it would go. There was already a decided difference between street levels, noticeable to this day, and the water tower, which stood on steel supports, had shifted to a dangerous angle.

Engineers were called in for consultation. They ordered a new tower; and the City Fathers decided that, while they were about it, they might just as well dig a new and better well. They got sulphur water.

For years, visitors to Fairbury drank copiously from the city faucets, under the impression that anything that tasted so evil must, of necessity, be strongly medicinal. Traveling salesmen complained vociferously, but the citizens became immune, even to the point that when they visited elsewhere, they innocently commented on the flatness of the water they encountered.

As water was close to the surface, the wells were dug by hand with a spade after locating the vein by "witching" with a forked stick, or by the Indian method of finding a group of willow trees. As the hole grew deeper, one of the crew had to be lowered into it on a loop at the end of a rope. The loose dirt was hauled up in a bucket on another rope.

Ethan Bills was one of the early well diggers. One time when he was working, he struck a boulder. Signalling his men to pull him the twenty-two feet back to the surface, he tied the rope around his

types of neighbors. These were the foreigners who stayed aloof from the others and who could not speak English, and then there were the New Englanders who seemed equally incomprehensible.

The Southerners had already brought with them a deep and bitter dislike of people from the Eastern states, derived from their various experiences with the cheating peddlers who had traveled their back country. The phrase, “damn Yankee”, was coined long before the Civil War, and now as new neighbors, they not only found them, as a general class, greedy for money and stingy, but downright inhospitable and unfriendly. Most of all, they resented the open, disdainful scorn of some of these people towards everyone but themselves.

Yet, even if the Southerners could have known the social differences, which separated them from the Down Easterners, they would not have been able to understand them.

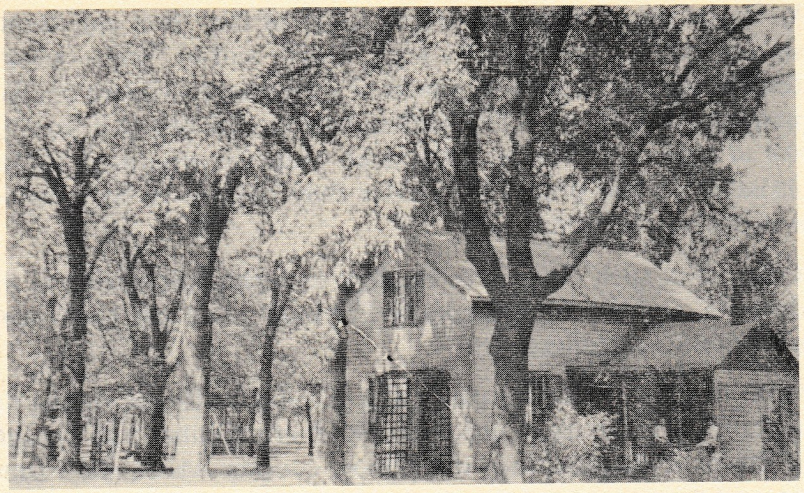
The New Englanders had come from an old, well-ordered, established society based on the manners and customs of the English homeland. Many of their cities, founded in the earliest of the colonies, had been congregations headed by their ministers. This gave their towns a special atmosphere of dignity and solidarity. Public schools and libraries were taken for granted. There were intellectual clubs and associations, and the formality of tradition.

Along the Atlantic Coast, where some Fairburians came from, the captains of the great sailing vessels decisively influenced the life ashore. A captain was in absolute command of his ship, and he did not speak to a young sailor on his ship, even though he lived next door to him at home. Ashore, he did not speak to him on the street. The very bearing of the captains repelled any familiarity, and the women were even haughtier than the men.

In their towns, everybody knew everybody, but not everybody spoke to everybody, even though they might meet on the street day after day for years. Their society was made up of small, exclusive cliques which they held inviolate. Everybody knew his own place and respected it. The deep water captains, ship builders, bankers, ministers, and professional men formed the First Families.

This caste system was demonstrated when the new church was built in Thomaston, Maine, the home of the Stackpole family.

It concerned the church pews. A mere donor to the building fund



The William Stackpole house, now modernized, still faces Marsh Park. Put together with handmade nails like spikes, it was intended to be cyclone - proof.

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was not entitled to a pew. The church was not exactly zoned, but the officers of the church did see that the pews went to the "right people", and they were sold for over five thousand dollars apiece, a fabulous sum. The ownership of a pew was taken seriously by everyone, and no intruders were allowed within them. The owners, furthermore, were subject to assessment when the church needed repairs, and consequently they formed a select social group within the church.

The Down East people were proud, keen, alert, shrewd, and accustomed to making quick decisions. They, also, were used to taking care of themselves and were noted for their independence. The women were widely traveled, having accompanied their sailor husbands, and they were interested in everything, everywhere all over the world. The wives of the well-to-do wore beautiful silks brought from China, furs from Russia, and elegant bonnets, gloves, parasols, and laces from Paris. Their homes were filled with choice furnishings from abroad.

Among other Easterners there also was a strict formality of address. When they spoke of relatives-in-law, it was "Uncle Smith", "Aunt King", or "Cousin Baker"; and a girl did not dream of being so presumptuous as to call her gentleman friend by his first name.

An Easterner, if he were genteel, spoke of the “first and second joints” of chicken, instead of a leg or thigh: and of “white meat”, instead of the breast. Indeed, a book of etiquette, published in 1863, demanded much more: “The perfect hostess will see to it that the works of male and female authors be properly separated on her bookshelves. Their proximity, unless they happen to be married, should not be tolerated.”

It was all in such contrast to the free and easy informality of the backwoods, and the Southerners of Fairbury could not have cared less about these niceties.

As for Negroes, there were only a hundred or so blacks among the inhabitants of Fairbury. Some of the Southern families had brought their slaves with them into the Illinois country where they freed them, and then permitted them to work out their indebtedness.

Most of the others had been field hands at the great Burr Oaks farm, at Sibley, Fayette Township, not far away, and they wandered into Fairbury when the land was sold. All of them were considered orderly and hard working.

At the time of the Civil War, this Burr Oaks estate was the largest farm in the world owned and controlled by one person.

Big Mike Sullivant, the owner, was one of the enlightened men who took real pride in his new state. He was an earnest worker for the advancement of Illinois, and supported numerous public-spirited enterprises. He practiced scientific farming, and was of great help to the small farmers who lived near him.

He had come from near Columbus, Ohio, where he owned a good sized farm he called “Broadlands”, and his overseer, John M. Miner, was also from Columbus.

Sullivant bought forty thousand acres of Illinois land (sixty-five square miles) from the government at a dollar and twenty-five cents an acre. He said he needed to raise only twenty bushels of corn to the acre, in order to pay the interest on his land at Illinois Central Railroad prices, the wages of his men, and give him a profit besides.

By September 23, 1871, his farm had attracted national attention. Harpers Weekly Magazine ran a feature article about it, and spoke with great admiration of the management of the farm. It was

military in organization, Sullivant himself was the commander in chief, with a Brigadier, John Miner, as aide. Twelve captains were beneath the aide, each with three lieutenants; and each lieutenant had a squad of men, all with their own mules and equipment, and directly responsible for getting the work done in a certain section. Every evening, every man reported in full to his superior, right on up the line to Sullivant himself.

The farm had two-hundred and fifty hired hands, all of whom were carefully chosen, and some of whom were Negroes. These included full-time masons, carpenters, wagoners, blacksmiths, painters and hunters. The duty of the latter was to keep the wild fowl and animals from destroying the crops.

John Miner, as overseer, drove a light buggy with a pair of quick stepping mules, and he traveled many miles every day to outlying points of the farm, as directed by Sullivant, to see if the work was well done, and checking the harness and machinery.

Sullivant's men worked a ten-hour day, with a two-hour break at noon to rest the men and stock. His was a temperance farm, too, with whiskey used strictly for snake bites. Consequently, there was almost no drunkenness or fighting. In the evening all the field hands and their families gathered for dancing to fiddles and an accordion, and very often the Sullivant family went down to watch them.

At the time the Harpers Weekly Magazine article was printed, much had been done to improve the land. One-hundred fifty miles of drainage ditches seven feet wide and two feet deep had been dug, and three-hundred miles of pig-tight Osage hedge had been set out.

Eleven thousand acres of corn had been planted, and this averaged forty-five bushels to the acre. The author remarked with awe that the corn yield would fill a continuous crib twelve feet wide, eight feet high, and five miles long.

There were five-thousand acres in other crops, too, for Sullivant believed in diversified farming. Fifty yoke of oxen and three-hundred mules were needed for the work, so many, that later some of his hired hands were known to brag they had sold Big Mike his own mules.

It was the depression of the later 1870's which bankrupted him, and his land and personal property were put up for sale. Isaac

McDowell was one of the brokers for the deal. Hiram Sibley, of Rochester, New York, bought thirteen thousand six-hundred acres of the place, and divided it into separate improved farms, each with its own tenant. The name of the little town of Burr Oaks was changed to Sibley, and the negroes who had called it home drifted away.

The black children attended the Fairbury public schools, and they had their own Methodist and Baptist churches and Sunday schools. Like the other churches, they held their camp meetings, which lasted some days and were well attended. Sometimes these were held at the fairgrounds, or in the woods south of town. At one service, the minister preached a rousing sermon about the Prodigal Son, after which the whole congregation partook of the fatted calf.

Like the other churches, they needed to raise money, and their specialty was their annual Possum Supper, which they gave at the Fairbury Hall. The suppers were well attended, as were their concerts. One of these latter featured melodies of the slave plantations, and a play expressly written for the occasion. It was a burlesque tragedy of the Ku Klux Klan.

They also had a colored Brass Band. Once, December 29, 1888, they even had a wedding at their church: "Fairbury social circles have been on the quivive for about ten days anent a wedding among the colored population. Report had it that it was to be a public affair and for once the report was true. The affair was held at the A.M.E. Church on Wednesday evening, the contracting parties being Robert Young of St. Louis, Mo., and Lavina Babb of this city. The church was well-filled with friends and acquaintances of the couple, and others, mostly white folks, curious to witness the novel event, a church wedding being an unusual thing in Fairbury."

There were also the immigrants direct from European countries, victims of religious and political oppression, frightened at the new, raw country in which they found themselves, and unable to speak English. An important portion of these were the German farmers who had been attracted by the rich soil of the Corn Belt, and they brought with them the careful farming methods which were to make Livingston County a leader in agriculture.

By 1878, enough Germans had settled in the country surrounding Fairbury that they were holding their own picnics and camp meet-

ings, and their local Apostolic Church came to have what was said to be the largest membership of its order in the world, although the mother organization remained in Germany.

Their church was a large, two story, white frame building on Paducah Avenue. In the rear, along three sides to form a courtyard, were the neat sheds for their horses and Klondike buggies. They were necessary for the protection of the animals in stormy weather because the services were day long meetings, with bread and coffee served at noon.

In addition to the Germans, five Hungarian families came to settle on the Conrad Munz farm to experiment with the raising of tobacco and watermelons. They built homes on the bank of Indian Creek which were replicas of the ones in the Old Country, making a little community which was both beautiful and picturesque.

Several other large groups of these immigrants followed, and then the public feeling toward them began to change. From an insignificant company, they had become so numerous that the Fairbury stores advertised German speaking clerks, and doctors who were called to their homes took interpreters with them. Political rallies were held for them with speeches in both languages.

It was not only the language barrier which kept these immigrants apart, but also their customs and dress. Their women, in contrast with the frills, feathers, and furbelows of the others, wore plain dark dresses, with tight waists and very full skirts over numerous petticoats.

Their hair, which was their own, was worn brushed smooth and tight into a knot on the nape of neck, and this was covered with a heavy black net. The hats, tiny black “sailors”, were severely plain and were worn straight upon their heads. On the streets they walked respectfully behind their men, waiting patiently as those greeted each other and stopped to talk.

With the husbands, there were no Derby hats or “handlebar” moustaches. They, too, all dressed alike in dark, baggy clothes, and broad trimmed black hats, and they all wore chin whiskers.

In addition to this differences of dress and customs, there was a rapidly growing resentment against them because of their reluctance to become naturalized citizens, and an ordinance was

discussed to prohibit anyone but a citizen from being employed by the village. Fights began breaking out, and doctors reported German men so brutally beaten as to be nearly killed. Their boys who came to town on Saturday nights went in groups, for safety's sake.

Fairbury boys began breaking into the cellars of the Germans to drink their homemade wine, destroy their property, and generally terrorize them. One gang of about a dozen young hooligans stole the harness from a widow's barn, together with all her chickens; and they left a note on her fence to inform her that they would be back to get everything else. They were. What they were unable to carry away, they destroyed. All her fruits and vegetables were taken, including an acre of corn, and they cut down her grape vines and berry bushes. The German boy who attempted to help her was beaten and very nearly killed.

Since the church members were pledged not to go to law, they had a particularly hard time of it: "A couple of Germans living in the east end of town, attempted to arrest a young lad named Adams, who they accused of breaking the window lights out of their homes last Saturday evening. They did not proceed according to the law of the land, but were going to kidnap him and take him home with them by main force. But young Adams had a lusty pair of lungs and made such an outcry that he soon had the whole neighborhood out, and the Germans were made to release the boy."

It is obvious that the attitude of the boys was only a reflection of their elders. Apparently no one investigated to find out if the windows were actually broken, and the paper loftily concluded the item with the advice: "It would be a good idea for some of our Teutonic citizens to study up a little on Blackstone."

The Tom Smith boys, however, received a dressing-down in print, but that seemed to be more in remembrance of their past escapades than in sympathy for the victims. On this occasion they had been on their drunken way home at night, when a dog belonging to a German family ran out to bark at them. Angered by this, they broke into the house where the family were all abed, smashed everything in sight, and finally collapsed into one of the beds with their muddy boots on. The family, unable to speak English, finally summoned aid from the neighbors, and the Smith boys were arrested and jailed.

CHAPTER III
The Independent Blade

One powerful voice for decency and order, above the bedlam, was that of the Independent Blade.

John Scibird, the editor, was a cut above the average. He came to Fairbury, Illinois, in 1876, bought two local papers: “The Fairbury Independent”, and “The Livingston County Blade”, and consolidated them into his own “Independent Blade”, which became a flourishing newspaper of the county.

As an editor, Scibird had a working knowledge of grammar, a fair vocabulary, and a type-setter who knew his business.

George Franzen, his compositor, a native of Fairbury, and known to all and sundry as “Peck”, even after he became mayor of the place, was so expert at setting type that he held a record of sorts throughout Illinois.

Ed Scibird, John’s son, was assistant editor; and Steve Murdock, son of the state’s attorney, whose office was overhead, was devil.

Sometimes there appeared at the head of the Personal Column, a sentence or two that suggested the devil had moved things on the compositor just before the paper went to press. The items had to be short, or “Peck” would have noticed them. “George Franzen got another perfumed letter”; or “George Franzen is not married”; or maybe even one like this: “Uncle Jesse Titus says that he had no objections to George Franzen going with girls, but he does object to George forming platoons of three with a blushing damsel on each arm and crowding people off the sidewalk”. There was skylarking in that old Blade office.

Sometimes the editor himself got a bit roguish, and mentioned “John McDowell’s Soiree with a Mule”, or called potatoes, “Irish Lemons”; and “H. H. Stafford hit ye editor with a hard snowball Wednesday”.

Or, there might be something like this: “As one of our bloods was sitting on the steps of a Paducah Avenue (Walnut Street) residence last Sunday evening beside his loved one, he claimed the right to a kiss for every shooting star. She at first demurred, as became a modest maiden, but finally yielded. She was even so accommodat-

ing as to call his attention to flying meteors that escaped his notice, and at last got him down to steady work on the light of a lantern that a brakeman was swinging about the depot in the distance where the stock train was switching. Isn't that about right, Frank?"

Then there was Annie Manning. Scibird, a man of vigorous courage and crusading spirit, went to war with his pen over Annie's abduction. Under the heading of "An Infernal Outrage", he told her story.

Annie Manning had come to Fairbury with the promise of a position of waitress at three dollars a week. It was good wages for such work, and Annie was anxious to get it, especially as it was Molly Stewart, her cousin, who had written to her. What Annie did not know was that Molly was an inmate of Leonard Gardner's house of prostitution, one of the many in Fairbury.

(By 1896 the city clerk had registered fifty-four such houses. Gardner's place, as were some others, was outside the town limits and would need no license).

Gardner and Molly took her there and kept her prisoner, but in a few days she managed to get word to the authorities.

After some gun play, the state attorney's men succeeded in rescuing her.

"Deep indignation was expressed by most all classes of citizens, at the dastardly and vicious attempt to ruin an innocent girl. Some of the best citizens, feeling that the law could hardly punish this outrage as it deserved, expressed the belief that nothing but the court of Judge Lynch would ever rid this community of this vile den where such wrongs be attempted or perpetrated. Certain it is, the patience of our people will not tolerate the nuisance much longer, judging from the feelings expressed on Monday when the prospect seemed fair that the guilty parties were likely to go unwhipped of justice."

That was on May 3. Three weeks later there was a short paragraph: "Sheriff Hunter was in town Monday, gathering in the boys for witnesses at the Gardner trial Tuesday. When Mr. Hunter gets after them, they have to go, and there's no use trying to dodge him."

The consequences in happy homes, following that visit of the sheriff, can be clearly imagined.

On June 21 of that same year, 1879, there was a final report: “On last Friday and Saturday the Gardner troupe of prostitutes shipped themselves and furniture to more congenial climes. Report says they went to Alton. They have gone and it is to stay, it is hoped. State’s Attorney Murdock and C. C. Strawn, Esq. have the hearty thanks of the better part of this community for the vigorous and effective prosecution of Gardner and his crew which resulted in the breaking up of the establishment, sending to prison and driving away the entire lot.”

In contrast to the fervor of the report on Annie Manning, the mention of the various appearances of Old Man Oliver on the streets of Fairbury a few years later, were written with notable restraint, for he was known to be a man of violent temper and quick to retaliate. Nevertheless, the visits to his attorney, Judge McDowell, were correctly regarded as being significant.

The man was over a hundred years old, and long ago had become a legend whose fame had spread far and wide. It was enhanced by his very appearance. Quarter part Indian, he was erect and agile, in spite of his great age, but his once black hair, which he wore at shoulder length, was white now, and it had a breath-catching, eerie look when blown by the wind.

What was more, his profanity, even in ordinary speech, was second to none, and Fairbury urchins were in terror of his very name, for it was said that as each one of his children were born, he took his pocket knife and notched their ears, identifying them as he did his animals.

He lived in the woods south of the present town of Chatsworth, twelve miles east of Fairbury, and his place is still called “Oliver’s Grove”.

For some years he was the sole white settler around there. One family venturing into the territory, built a cabin fifteen miles away from him. Oliver found out about it, and paid them a visit. With searing comments, he ordered them to move along, because he didn’t fancy having neighbors living that close.

Oliver enjoyed visiting, however, and on his yearly trips to Ottawa, to get his wheat ground, he always stopped at the William Fugate farm at the Vermillion River ford. Mrs. Fugate never failed

to give him a good meal, but the men ate together alone, while she saw to it that she and the children stayed out of ear shot.

The man had been born in New Jersey state, sometime around 1786. His father had been a quartermaster in the Revolutionary War, and he was a personal friend of Benjamin Franklin, who had given him a portrait of himself. When Oliver started west he brought with him his father's quartermaster papers and many other documents of the Revolution, together with the portrait, which he prized highly, especially as he kept five thousand dollars hidden in the back of it. All of the things were lost in the fire that burned down his farm house.

According to the family legend, Oliver, with his wife and children, was headed for California when he came to this grove of trees which appealed to him as a camp site. He entered it, and immediately found himself surrounded by Indians.

He drove his case knife into the nearest tree as a sign of peace, and the Kickapoos presently withdrew to their council fire to hold a pow-wow. Mrs. Oliver built a little fire of her own, and cooked supper for her family. After they had eaten, the Indians returned to conduct him to their chief, who offered him their pipe of peace. Oliver was not a smoker, but he always said this was one time when he was glad to indulge.

The family lived in a teepee at first, and then the Indians helped them build a log cabin. They were friendly, but they were still suspicious of him, for the Black Hawk War was brewing. Caution compelled Oliver always to stay in plain sight where they could watch him easily. They did trust him sufficiently, however, to allow him to warn the settlers at Avoca. He was even able to arrange a meeting for them with the chief, and got partial assurance for their safety if they left at once.

Oliver did not go back east with the other settlers, and this made him a marked man. He stayed there at the Grove during the war, coming and going with more or less freedom. The chief grew so fond of him he named his son for him. Later, Oliver gave the chief's name to the village of Saunemin.

As a matter of fact, the Kickapoos did not appear especially hostile to the white settlers. They had been converted to Christianity by Reverend William Walker, a Circuit Rider from Ottawa. When

Oliver came they were holding their own services, and they had prayer “books” of drawings to tell the stories, with walnut boards for covers.

Moreover, there was another white man who had won their special esteem. Major Darnall was one of the earliest settlers in the territory south of Fairbury, and his cabin was close to the trail the Kickapoos used to go back and forth to their hunting grounds.

Late one autumn, a little party of braves stopped at Darnall’s cabin, and asked if they might leave their supply of maple sugar with him until they could pick it up again the next spring. They had a long, bitterly cold winter, and food became very scarce, but when the Indians called for their sugar, Darnall handed it to them intact, and they went their way marveling at the white man’s scrupulous honesty.

Years later, after the Kickapoos had been removed from the territory to a reservation in Oklahoma, Darnall finally admitted he had been mightily tempted to use the sugar, but he was stopped cold when he discovered it was thick with dog hairs.

The Kickapoos themselves were a fine-looking people, intelligent, industrious, and tolerably clean. Their women were far more beautiful than the average squaws. They all did the work, raised the crop of corn, beans, and potatoes, and dressed the game and fish their men brought home.

There were about 700 in the tribe, and they had a council house and village by the river near the site of the future town of Fairbury, and the French used it as a trading post. The soil of the Commons there was rich with arrow heads and other relics, but this was all covered over when the railroad hauled in dirt on flat cars and filled it four feet deep.

The permanent Kickapoo village was at the Grove where they had built a large council house, with ninety-seven wigwams and several small encampments. The wigwams were made of the rushes which grew luxuriantly in the river bottoms, and they were carpeted with mats made of more of the same. Their relics showed that they made good utensils and weapons, and one ingenious hatchet had a hole in the length of the handle and a pipe bowl in the head so that it could be used either for scalping or smoking.

The Kickapoos were renowned as a nation of warriors, and they had joined with the Miamies and Pottawatomies against the Confederation of the Illinois tribes in their last stand at the battle of Starved Rock, in 1774.

Just one year later, the Kickapoos and Pottawatomies quarreled with the Miamies over the division of the territory they had won. In an effort to settle the dispute sensibly, each side chose three-hundred men to fight. The battle took place on the banks of Sugar Creek, south of their grove, and when it was over, there were just twelve men who were not killed or seriously wounded: five Miamies and seven Kickapoos.

After that the Kickapoos and Pottawatomies divided the territory between them, the Kickapoos taking the portion to the east, and the boundary was marked by a trail which passed near Oliver's Grove. The trail averaged eight inches deep and fifteen inches wide, and traces of it exist even today.

The Black Hawk War was over by the fall of 1832, and once the Indians were taken to the reservation, the white settlers began coming in to occupy the land. It was not officially surveyed until a year later, and everyone squatted wherever he chose, provided, of course, that no one else was occupying it previously.

Oliver had been left in possession of the Kickapoo village, and so he just stayed there; and, since he was a civil engineer and surveyor by profession, he received the job of surveying all that part of the country. He was in on the ground floor, and he could take his choice of land. He acquired over four thousand acres of the best, most of it in timberland, for he wanted no other, and he was one of the great land owners of early Illinois.

When the mail routes were established, his home was the post office, and then, as settlers became more numerous, it became a sort of inn offering shelter to travelers. So widespread was the sinister reputation of the place, that men lodging there for the night slept on their guns.

There was supposed to be, hidden away in his timber, a great pile of iron wheel rims left over from the burning of many immigrant wagons, the owners of which were never seen again, and the tales of Oliver's robberies and murders were endless.

Pioneers were warned not to stop at Oliver's but to keep on going until they got to Billy Fugate's. Sometimes the river was so high they could not ford it, and then they would have to make camp on the river bank until the water went down. Mrs. Fugate baked bread for them, and gave them milk and eggs, and they had an opportunity to rest in safety.

If the current was not too swift, the travelers still were able to ford the flooded stream. They roped the wagon box securely to the running gear, so that it would not float away from the wheels, and drove it to a high bank above the ford. Everyone remained in their places in the wagon, while the horses, still harnessed to it, were driven to jump off the bank. They swam downstream until they came to the regular ford and were able to walk out, still pulling their wagon and passengers.

Oliver's land lay around Chatsworth and Piper City, and it was all marshes where wild ducks and game abounded. A rim of higher ground encircled this, but somewhere in the middle of the bog was a long stretch of quicksand, discovered when the land was tiled and drained. Small animals could scoot across this area, but all the larger ones had to go around or be forever lost. Without a doubt, this quicksand was responsible for at least part of the murders attributed to Oliver.

When the Blade began to chronicle his activities, his first wife was long since dead, as was the second one, an Indian girl. Then, at the age of 65, he had married a sixteen year old girl, and had children by her, also.

The poor wife had a stormy time of it. Divorce meant ostracism, but she finally hailed her 93 year old husband into court and charged him with adultery, desertion, and failure to provide for his family for ten years. Upon his admission that it was all true, the court granted the divorce, awarded her four hundred acres in outright ownership, and gave her the custody of the minor children, the youngest of whom was eight.

Infuriated by this decision, Old Man Oliver deeded all his land to Judge Woodford McDowell, of Fairbury, and Judge Payson, of Pontiac, so that his former wife could not get hold of any of it. Judge McDowell was paid for his legal services with land which he later discovered to be all under water.

The animosity between Oliver and his family grew to such fantastic proportions that, after one Saturday night when he was bound, choked and beaten, then robbed of six hundred dollars, he publicly identified one of the assailants as his own son.

A few months before he died, his children summoned him into court again for a trail by jury, and it was decided that he was mentally incompetent to manage his own affairs. The judge appointed a conservator for him, which threw Oliver into a black fury. He was one-hundred and twelve years old, but he was still quite active physically, and able to travel alone wherever he wished; and so he appealed his case, swearing to fight it to the limit.

He was in Chenoa as the result of this, when he was taken with a congestive chill, and died "alone and among strangers". So great a bitterness did his children feel for him, that not one of them was present at his death bed; and when his will was read, it was discovered that he had conveyed most of his remaining property to some nieces.

His frustrated natural heirs brought suit against Judge Payson, charging that the conveyance of over one thousand acres of land was made without adequate consideration, and moreover, Franklin Oliver had been incompetent to give such a deed. In spite of all this, Judge Bookwalter, of Danville, who heard the case, decided every point in favor of Payson, leaving the complainant no legal ground for action. Popular opinion, already against Payson and McDowell, felt that these members of the Bar were conspiring together, and that all of them were rascals.

The Oliver children appealed, but it was not until two years later that the Supreme Court made Payson disgorge. It ruled that the title to about half of the land, which he had purchased at a sheriff's sale, was good, but the rest of it, then worth about fifty thousand dollars, had been fraudulently obtained. Payson was ordered to give an accounting of the rents and the proceedings of the sale, but he was to receive credit for any improvements he had made.

In the case of the land Judge McDowell had received, however, there was no lawsuit. It was commonly said that a short time before his death Old Man Oliver paid him a visit, and had frightened him so effectively that he was only too glad to return his share of the loot, which was the land willed to the nieces.

Interest in the trial was widespread. Oliver himself was anything but popular, but there was so much sympathy for Mrs. Oliver and her children that it ruined the reputations of both Payson and McDowell. Public opinion against them was so strong that both of the men were forced to leave the country. Both of them moved to Washington, D.C., where they made their homes thereafter.

For McDowell, who had been a first settler, a founder of Avoca and of the Pioneer Methodist Church, a pillar of the Fairbury Methodists, the first lawyer and Justice of the Peace, a Judge of the County Court, an organizer and the first president of the Old Settlers' Association, a man of considerable wealth and great dignity, the Blade had not one word of farewell.

For the newspaper, sensations like these came all too seldom. The rest of the time the weekly issues were filled with accounts of practical jokes on prominent citizens, drunken brawls, the latest details of the more interesting romances, and, of course, the parties. Scibird's knowledge of reader psychology was a practical one. Instead of saying that twenty-five guests attended a function, he would state, with a flourish, that "a quarter of a hundred were present". Any gathering with any pretense of style was "recherche". "Soiree" was another word he commonly used for a party, as was "soiree dansant". He described weddings with a full list of guests, and the presents given by each. As did all the other editors of his time, Scibird called any home bigger than a shack, a "mansion". The new Isaac Walton home was the exception: this one was a "chateau".

(A mansion was once defined as a house which had a back stairs, or one having three or more chimneys. This latter was because they indicated the number of rooms the owner heated in winter, indicating his scale of luxurious living.)

Possibly to Scibird's French influence could be traced the local livery stable that advertised itself as "Seller's Equine Bureau"; and the Fairbury barber who made the "Pate De Foie Gras Hair Tonic", which he guaranteed to be a cure for dandruff.

During the weeks when things were dull, anything served as news, and the editor gravely reported that, "Will Fugate's cow died of a broken neck". If all else failed, he fell upon any rumors going around and printed those.

This happy era of the publishing of the Independent Blade ended in 1881, with the death of John Scibird. His son, Ed, took charge for a short time until it could be sold, and then the family moved away. Wherewithit, there followed for the next thirteen years, a succession of editors who tarried but briefly, repented of their bargain, and moved on to more lucrative business. It was evident that most of them were unhappy with the paper, and subscriptions fell off. To make matters worse, Fairbury had another newspaper now. One of their own migrant editors had sold the Independent Blade, with usual promise not to start another paper in Fairbury.

All that was needed were a few cases of type, a bundle of paper, a Washington hand press, and a "devil". There was evidence, too, that only a little education was necessary to become an editor, and some of the newspapers made the reader wonder what in the world had been the editor's occupation before he took to print.

This agreement not to start another Fairbury newspaper was broken as a matter of course, and the Local Record came into being in 1883. Just seven months later, he sold out again to Charles Brydia, who had been publishing the Saunemin, Illinois, paper.

Immediately the two Fairbury papers began a running battle, for it was customary, and the readers expected it. The Blade traded insults with him, calling him, "Brydia, the windbag of the Local Record", and received bouquets in kind. The Blade editor got discouraged and decided to sell, and this time part interest was bought by young Newt Fulton, a local boy, who had been Brydia's own foreman.

Also with the Blade now, was "Peck" Franzen, back again from wandering; and, with a pair like that, the Blade suddenly came to life.

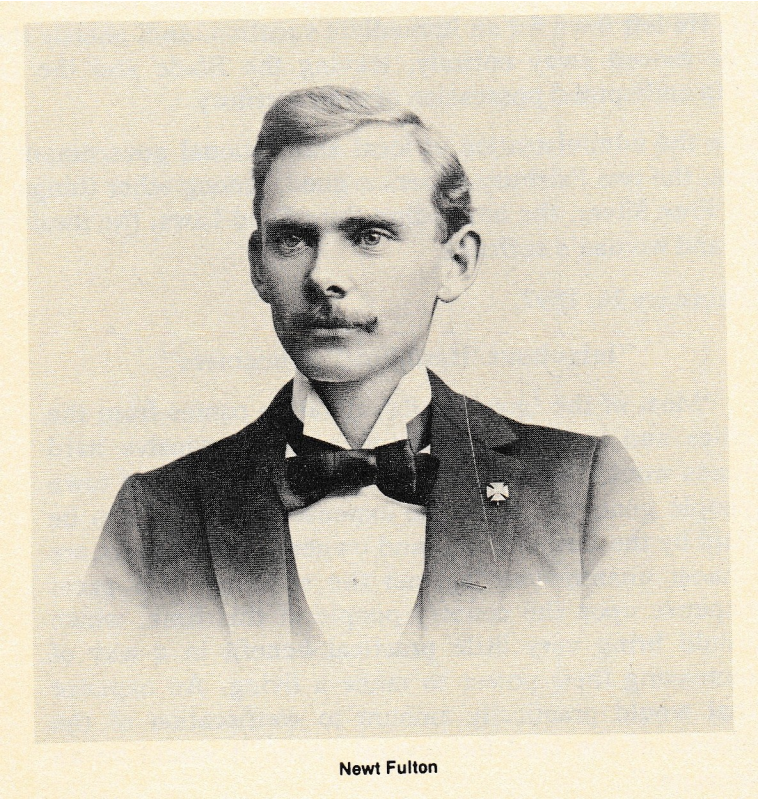
From then on, Brydia was busy dodging, although he generally gave as good as he took, but there were times when Newt's pen was a sharp one.

"Cap Seems to Fit"

"A certain alleged newspaper man hereabouts complains that the Blade never mentioned him by name. It doesn't have to. Every time the Blade says, 'donkey', the A. N. M. in question brays, 'here'; and

every time the Blade says, ‘skunk’, the A. N. M. stinks responsively. For instance, the Blade article of which he complains was about an alleged newspaper man who had been lying about his circulation, and how did he know the Blade meant him, and what call had he to get mad? This A. N. M. is constantly exemplifying the words of the old hymn:

‘Here, Lord, I give myself away,
’Tis all that I can do’.”


Newt Fulton

Straight into this barrage there walked a Mr. Windle who already owned a newspaper in nearby El Paso, and who had decided to try his fortune in Fairbury.

From the very first, his position was equivocal, because his Fairdealer professed to be strongly Prohibition, whereas his El Paso

paper was pro-saloon; and the night he was drunk and fell off the train did not go un-noticed, you may be sure.

By some means or another, Windle got himself elected to the Fairbury School Board, and shortly thereafter his Fairdealer received a nice job of school printing, without the formality of all the papers offering bids on the same. This was straight against the law, and immediately the air quivered with the baying of the newshounds. The press of the neighboring towns took up the chase, and both the Local Record and the Blade dropped everything else to concentrate on Windle.

It was a masterly performance, and it was too much for Mr. Windle. He left town for an immediate vacation, and, shortly thereafter, he moved away entirely, leaving the Blade and the Local Record to undisputed possession of their territory.

Beside the administration of local and national government and elections, the two Fairbury papers argued, among other things, the issue of Free Silver, the impending Pure Food Laws, the local mine strikes, and woman's suffrage.

February 26, 1897.

"Iniquitous 'Hard Road' Scheemers"

"Most of the 'good roads' agitation comes from the cities and is based on the idea that expensive hard roads would be of great benefit to bicyclers and town people generally while the expense would have to be paid by the farmers and land owners. The farmers are almost unanimously against the saddling of a great expense upon the country people at this time, which would bring very little practical benefit in a way of increasing their power to make a living. An expense that would practically amount to confiscation of the income of the land for several years. It would be an outrage."

Newt did not neglect Pontiac, either. Their Free Trader had printed this: "Poor Fairbury. For ten years she has been looking forward to the day when she could say, 'We are as big as Pontiac'. Her 2,300 cannot come up to Pontiac's 3,200."

Newt's reply was instant: "According to their usual custom, the

Free Trader men have warped the figures in the case. Could we have the privilege of counting the inmates of the reformatory and the people at the County Farm, as it is done at Pontiac, we could fix up Fairbury's census so it would be more than that of the county seat."

Newt was quick to call attention to events in other neighboring towns, but Pontiac seemed to be particularly vulnerable: "A wave of religious prosperity has apparently struck the City of Pontiac and the churches are reaping a bounteous harvest of souls. Meetings are being held in billiard halls, saloons, coal shafts and the court house. It is to be hoped that the meetings continue until the board of supervisors meet so that the Democratic members may be given an opportunity for redemption."

In Fairbury, as everywhere else in the country, politics were the life blood of the newspapers. The Blade had become howling Republican, and the Record was rabid Democrat.

In the early years of Fairbury, three tall flag poles stood on Main Street. The one at the east end, near the town dump, represented the Democratic party; the middle one, near the depot, the Republican; and the Prohibition pole, with a large gilded ball on top, was at the west end near the Arcade Block.

The Democratic pole was not as tall as the others because it broke when they were erecting it, and, although mended, it was shorter than intended.

The politicians never tore down each other's poles, but as one of them put it, "each party used to rally around their own poles and just raise the dickens" with speeches and singing. Once in a while there would be an argument on the edge of the crowd, but it rarely ended in a fight. Occasionally they would have a street dance around their pole, and then the women would be invited.

When particularly hot issues were being discussed, the men held torchlight parades on horseback, and the little boys organized ones of their own, and had a glorious time marching with horns and flags.

The voters attended rallies held in neighboring towns, and then the railroads made up special trains for the crowds. Some of these were fourteen cars long, and it took a conductor to each car to keep any kind of order. It was commonly believed that the Republicans

behaved themselves fairly well, but about fifty percent of the Democrats got drunk.

At their rallies, the Democrats were content with a glee club from a neighboring town, but not so the Republicans. As early as 1888 their speaker's stand was lit by an electric light powered by a home dynamo; and the night Private Joe Fifer campaigned for governor, they held a big parade with fireworks, and the "Roman Candles, rockets and blue lights cast a refulgent glare over the entire city, the like of which was never seen before in Fairbury".

More rallies were held if the party was victorious, and election bets were paid off, usually down on Main Street, with plenty of horse play, and fun for the onlookers.

It was well worth it, because Fairbury has always remained a stronghold of the Republican Party, staunchly supported by the Blade.

The third political party of Fairbury was the Prohibition. It was a potent one which cut across Republican and Democratic lines, to re-group again at the "drys", who were against the "wets".

Although Illinois was no longer a frontier state, the rough element had persisted, prolonged by the effects of the Civil War. There was a saying, common at the time, that there was "no law west of Chicago, and no God west of Dodge City". Illinois was on the border line; and, as before mentioned, Fairbury was already known as one of the toughest towns in the state.

The Blade of July 30, 1886, had something explicit to say about the matter: "From a business viewpoint, Fairbury cannot be excelled by any town in the state, but when it comes to public enterprise, public pride and public welfare, we are not out of the woods by any manner of means. Last week our business men complained bitterly of the parties who egged the baseball umpire, claiming it would have a tendency to hurt their business interests, but they should remember that their own lack of interest in a public way is doing more to damage Fairbury than all the eggs this side of Easter. Dead! Positively dead and decomposing, is the verdict against us when considered in any other light than that of business. Churches standing vacant, the streets growing up in weeds, boys and hoodlums exercising their own home rule; as protection against fire,

no waterworks of any kind, and $3000.00 a year from six saloons. Such a state of things should make every one of our citizens blush with shame, but it won't."

The chief reason for this general atmosphere of lawlessness was the attitude of the public, everywhere, towards a drunkard. People reasoned that when a man was drunk, he was not in possession of his normal faculties, and, therefore, he did not realize what he was doing. Consequently, he was not to be held accountable for any of his actions during that time. He could kill a man, yet go scott-free, whereas a man who was sober would be hung.

This unwritten law about drunkards very nearly caused the lynching of John Virgin, one of the most popular men in Fairbury, when he defended a crippled black man.

Dick Quarles, or "Side Hill Dick" as he was called by everybody in town, because one leg was several inches shorter than the other, had been born a slave. During the Civil War he had run away from his owners and had sought refuge with John Virgin's regiment. He proved to be a good cook, and otherwise made himself so useful that he was allowed to stay. When the war was over and the men were preparing to go home, Dick plead so earnestly to go with them that Virgin took pity on him and brought him to Fairbury. He let Dick sleep in the office of his livery stable and saw to it that he did not go hungry.

Dick soon became well known around town. He was generally seen with his shoeshine box over his shoulder, and he frequently ran errands although he was often drunk.

In 1870, when the Fifteenth Amendment came into effect, there was an election of township officers, and Dick was chosen for the honor of being the first black man in Fairbury to cast an election ballot. Before the event, there was much public apprehension of reprisals by the southern sympathizers, but, to the great satisfaction of everyone, the large crowd of onlookers proved to be good natured, and everything went off in fine style.

Dick was again to engage the attention of the Blade, and this time he was the innocent cause of serious trouble for John Virgin, his protector.

On this day, a farmer from north of Fairbury had stopped too long

in one of the saloons. He was very drunk when he finally came out into the street, chanced to meet Dick, and began to torment him. The little cripple managed to pull away from him and ran off down the street. Later they met again at the livery stable, and the farmer got to treating him still more roughly. This time, when he escaped, Dick threw a brick and hit him, and the man instantly gave chase. Dick fled down Main Street, but his crippled leg gave way, and when the farmer caught him, he began to beat and kick him, shouting that he was going to kill him.

A large crowd quickly gathered, and Virgin happened to come up on the edge of it. When he realized that it was Dick who was being manhandled, he burst through the crowd, grabbed the farmer, beat him quickly, neatly and decisively, and hustled Dick to safety.

The drunken fellow remained in the street, yelling and ranting until the police finally arrested him and threw him into jail.

The crowd of onlookers remained along the street. Feeling ran high, and the criticisms were sharp. True to the times, they felt that Virgin had been much too severe with him, since he was quite drunk and therefore was not to be held accountable for his actions. Besides, it only concerned a Negro.

Talk grew into arguments, and the arguments became the more inflamed, and the ugly beginnings of mob action were taking shape. Fortunately, a few of the crowd had seen what had preceded the final battle, and they knew it was the farmer, instead of Dick, who had been the aggressor from the beginning. They managed to make themselves heard, and the crowd gradually drifted away.

Nevertheless, Virgin prudently stayed out of sight for a day or two, while the farmer, having posted bond, went home to sober up.

Several days later the man returned to town, hunted up Virgin, and made a handsome apology. Then, arm in arm, the two of them walked to Squire Shepherd's office and settled for their break of the peace, Virgin paying both fines.

One day, much later, the Blade reported Dick for a final time. He was found dead out in the country along the railroad tracks. It was Sunday morning, but a train was made up, and a lot of the men went out and brought him back to Fairbury for an inquest.

During Dick's time, Fairbury had a hundred or so Negro inhabitants. They were always orderly and hard-working, and some of them are still remembered with affection.

Downtown, not an evening passed without its fist and gun fights. Usually several of them were "good, bloody ones", and the doctors were busy afterwards.

Most of the altercations were genuine, but this early Fairbury had one man who picked fights just for the fun of it. He was Joe Urrick, a butcher's assistant, and he was huge, a bully and a bruiser. A half a beef was nothing for him to carry, and he could toss a two-hundred fifty pound barrel of salt into a wagon.

Technically, Urrick was never drunk when he fought, because he held his liquor so well it would have taken all the whiskey in town for the effects to be noticeable, a nice problem in case of an argument. He had things pretty much his way, until one Christmas season when all the men of the town had gathered in Livingston Square to "roll for a turkey".

In that sport, the turkey itself was tied to a post at one side of the square. Each contestant in turn was blindfolded and given a wheelbarrow to push, but before he started they turned him around three times. After that he had not the least idea which direction the turkey was, and the spectators always had a hilarious time. The man who came the nearest to the turkey got it.

One of the contestants on this particular day, was a farmer named Clark, a tall, rawboned fellow with long arms and heavy fists, and he was cold sober. When it came his turn to roll, Urrick appeared on the scene. He had been drinking, and wanted the turkey for himself, and so he demanded that Clark yield him his place. When Clark refused, he got angry and threatened him, telling him to take off his coat and fight. Clark objected, saying that the weather was too cold, whereupon Urrick grew so abusive that the farmer's patience finally wore out. Hard work and decent living gave him the advantage over the big man's weight, and, once he got winded, Clark beat him to ribbons.

Later that afternoon, a couple of Urrick's cronies caught Clark near the Arcade Block, and they decided to get even with him. Clark, however, hit the first one so hard he lifted him clear off his

feet and smashed him through a plate glass window. Then Clark turned on the other. The fellow ran into a store, and after Clark managed to corner him, he hit him a crack that sent him into the red hot heating stove, knocking it down. That conclusively ended the fight.

The last of Urrick, as far as Fairbury was concerned, came one night a little later when he tried to pick a fight with a much smaller man. His victim became so frightened he snatched his gun from his pocket, put it in his own mouth, and pulled the trigger. By some miracle he failed to kill himself, but because Urrick was "sober" when he tried to pick the fight, popular feeling ran so high that he had to skip town.

Liquor to feed this belligerence was within arm's reach anywhere downtown. In 1880 there were seven saloons, two for every block along Main Street, and one in the east block. They opened at six in the morning, when the early birds went to work. They were busy all day long; and they were the last of the business houses to close at night, after ten o'clock, when the helplessly inebriated were thrown out into the alley, to be sorted over by their friends and taken home on wheelbarrows.

If a customer lacked the money for a drink, it usually could be charged; and there were no age requirements to procure it. The saloons were swarming with boys, and the whole of Fairbury was infested with gangs of drunken juveniles, some of them under ten years of age, who rampaged the streets until late at night, and terrorized the inhabitants with their fighting and vandalism.

One contributing factor to this state of affairs, of course, was the nightly fires. The excitement and emotional tensions, as well as the freedom of action they engendered, naturally were bound to have a powerful effect upon the youngsters.

It was the fathers of Fairbury who called the halt.

They were appalled by the moral deterioration of the boys they loved. "Boys will be boys", did not excuse the conditions. Moreover, many of the fathers had suffered property damage at the hands of the hooligans, not to mention the various indignities to their persons.

They mentally rolled up their sleeves, and they organized a

temperance society. It was not a social group, and its great aim was to get laws passed which would bring the liquor interests under control - laws with teeth in them.

It was the solid citizens of the community who joined that society, men of substance who were pillars of the churches, and who believed passionately in the future of Fairbury, provided it could be made a law-abiding community.

There were members of that society who devoted the rest of their lives to it, like Doc Ostrander. It was the great-hearted men like Doc, who came and went among the homes, that had firsthand knowledge of what happens in a drunkard's family, the shame and misery, brutality and hunger. It was unthinkable for a woman to work outside her home as long as there was a man in her family, and there were no government or charitable agencies to help them, only the chance of the sympathy of some kindhearted person.

More noticeable were the pitiful horses of the drunkard, unblanketed against the weather, standing for hours at the hitching posts in front of the saloons, mute witnesses of neglect.

Another of those devoted temperance workers was Oscar Westervelt, who vigorously fought the liquor interests his whole life long. So intensely was he involved, just the way he walked coming home told his family which way the election had gone, before he even spoke to them. His work was so effective that when he died, and all the business houses closed during the funeral services as a mark of respect for a prominent citizen, the saloon keepers indignantly refused to comply. They said he had caused them so much trouble during his lifetime that they were not about to pay him any honor, now that he was dead. His family rightly regarded it as the finest tribute he could have received.

The Prohibition pole was burned down in 1888, during a particularly vicious campaign. Each local election was a pitched battle, but, however the outcome might vary, the pressure of the temperance group was unremitting. By concentrating on the Village Board, they forced the passage of a series of ordinances that at least curbed the evils.

Every saloon keeper had to give a three-thousand dollar bond and have two good securities. His license cost six-hundred dollars, and could be revoked.

His hours of business were sharply defined and shortened: not before 5 a.m., nor later than 10 p.m..

His premises had to be kept reasonably clean, and the windows washed to give a clear view into the place. No pool tables or any games of any nature were allowed. No rowdiness was permitted.

Saloon keepers could not sell liquor to minors. Boys were no longer allowed in the place, nor were they permitted to carry buckets of beer to their fathers or any other relatives.

Worst of all, according to the saloon keepers, they were made to close on Sundays. Using the front door only, the owner or his assistant might enter the building to tend the fires or light the night lamp, but he could not stay a minute longer.

To a local druggist, this was heaven-sent opportunity. He had no liquor license, but he hastened to relieve the drouth by under-the-counter sales. The squawks of the indignant saloon owners went unheeded by the authorities, however, until bartenders discovered that some of the other store owners, who were also members of the town council, were illegally selling tobacco to young boys. The saloon men immediately brought suit for more than a thousand dollars against these council members, and a bitter fracas developed. It was watched with glee by all the neighboring towns, and the Lexington paper gloated: “It promises to be a regular Kilkenny cat fight”.

The laws they managed to pass, the Prohibitionists proceeded to enforce, and a start, at least, was made toward the moral clean-up of the town.

All during this time, the women were by no means idle. They had several flourishing temperance societies of their own, undoubtedly affiliated with the various churches, and all with social overtones. Just before the local option elections, however, they joined their husbands in mass meetings held at Fairbury Hall as a giant demonstration of public opinion calculated to worry the saloon people.

Since they were denied the power of the vote, they were severely handicapped in their efforts, and after a few years their little societies joined forces under the national organization, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, or the W.C.T.U., as it was thereafter known.

Under militant national leadership, they espoused the cause of Women's Rights. The Blade, under pressure, gave them space for a column to present their views, although one editor, finding himself caught between the battle lines, nervously protested that their opinions were not necessarily his own.

The columns were good enough that they succeeded in raising an indignant question: if the girls want to be so equal, why not give them a saloon of their own?

The suggestion was not repeated. It was too horrifying.

Later, Newt Fulton, the new editor, was plainly outspoken.

"Give the Girls A Chance"

"The editor of a neighboring paper deplores the tendency of the girls of this day to learn how to make money for themselves, and wants them to stop crowding out the 'natural bread winners' and stick to the natural paths of modesty and sweet dependence. Such talk is pretty common, and is for the most part unmitigated nonsense. Dependence, by a capable person, male or female, of proper spirit, is not 'sweet' but the reverse. Moreover, this much slopped about 'sweet dependence' often means 'nothing to wear and less to eat'. 'The natural paths of modesty and sweet dependence' is the masculine way of saying that a woman ought to merge her life in that of some man, probably her mental and moral inferior, to be the sport of his desires, the slave of his wants or whims, the victim of his vices, with little recognition in this world and scant hope for the next. It often means the starving of the body and soul and intellect, the wicked sacrifice of the most precious of God's creatures on the altar of mistaken duty and pernicious prejudice."

The unseemly activities of their wives to secure the vote could be seriously embarrassing sometimes, as when one of them was invited to give a recitation at a farmer's meeting. Instead of treating her audience to the usual humorous poem, the lady launched into an impassioned plea for equal rights. The men regarded it as a betrayal, and it almost broke up the meeting. With all that agitation,

something had to give, and the women were finally permitted to cast their first votes for the University of Illinois trustee. It was a great day.

Eagerly as they worked for suffrage, they never forgot their original purpose of nation-wide Prohibition, and that their most effective weapon to accomplish this was the education of the children. Their message was delivered in special temperance songs, recitations and dialogues, and in plays such as: “The Drunkard’s Last Loaf”, and “Ten Nights in a Bar Room”; and the girls vowed that “the lips that touch liquor shall never touch mine”.

The W.C.T.U. got the churches to hold regular Temperance Sundays, with special sermons from the pulpit, and Sunday School lessons which stressed the perils of the Demon Rum. As a climax, with men and women combined, the state legislature passed a law compelling the grade school physiology classes to include an intensive study of the effects of alcohol upon the human system.

The Prohibitionists had won. It was now a disgrace to be a drunk.

CHAPTER IV
The Vale of Avoca

Avoca had been a tiny hamlet on the west bank of the Vermillion River. William McDowell had come there in 1832, from Scioto County, Ohio, with his blind wife, Sarah, and their seven children.

Scarcely had their cabin been erected than there were signs of an Indian uprising. The worried settlers consulted with Franklin Oliver, and through his mediation they were permitted to leave unharmed if they went at once.

Seven families were loaded into six wagons and started back to Indiana, but they soon had to halt while one of the women gave birth. It necessitated a delay of two days, and the little party was appalled when a couple of warriors were seen approaching their camp.

The women and children, and even some of the men, panicked and were weeping. It was a moment of truth, and a situation which speedily, and for all time, exposed the timid.

William McDowell went right ahead with building the fire for their evening meal. He said he wasn't about to get scalped on an empty stomach.

At any rate, the Indians turned out to be friendly Kickapoos who had merely come to bid them farewell.

The party moved on as soon as the young Mother was able to endure the motion of the wagon, and they reached safety in Indiana without further incident.

Later, after the Black Hawk war was all over and the Indians had gone, the settlers returned again to occupy their land.

William McDowell died only two years later, and his sons had to fell trees to carry his coffin through the woods to the new cemetery on a little knoll across the river.

Thomas G. McDowell, his younger brother, arrived in 1848, and was the first man to settle on the open prairie. He was half mile or so from the timber belt along the river, and other people considered it was fool-hardy of him because there was always the hazard of the

terrible prairie fires. Besides, the trees gave their cabins protection from the winter storms and were a nearby fuel supply.

In the fall of 1850, the McDowells were joined by Elizabeth, the widow of a third brother, John, with her nine children, from Montgomery County, Indiana. Isaac P., father of "the McDowell boys", was the oldest of these.

When the number of settlers had increased sufficiently, Woodford McDowell, William's son, laid out his farm into town lots, and named his new settlement "Avoca". It was an Indian word, meaning "the meeting of the waters", since it lay at the junction of the two branches of the Vermillion River. The site was only a little better than the rest of the land along the stream for all of it was extremely marshy and covered with a tall, rank, tough vegetation known as "slough grass". Even the timber was full of thick, briery underbrush.

Avoca soon became a thriving community, with little lanes wandering through the trees among the homes. Woodford McDowell and his brothers, James and John Will, established a general store with a post office, and a steam saw mill, which also had stones for grinding corn. Several other stores followed, together with a shingle mill, blacksmith shop, hotel and school house.

The Avoca people had a hard time of it. There was no money in the country, and no market for their produce, but they managed to survive and raise large families. Deer, wild turkeys and other game were abundant. Honey was for the taking. For coffee, they ground parched corn. Their only source of income was from the furs and deerskins, provided they could be got to the market in Springfield. The little money these brought went a great way, and they did not go into debt because they could not: nobody else had any money, either.

There was a ford near the village, and they established a ferry, but in the winter the teams simply drove across the ice. On one occasion it broke, leaving the horse astraddle two blocks of ice and the wagon on a third one. With frantic poling they got the horse's feet back under him, and the wagon behind, so that the three blocks of ice could be steered across the river to solid ground.

There were no roads at first, and the river was their principal

means of travel. The McDowell brothers, Woodford and James, shared the ownership of a canoe with a neighbor, but they had an altercation, which resulted in James going in the night to saw it in half. He removed his part, leaving the rest of it chained to the bank.

Most of the Avoca settlers were Methodists. They met in the McDowell cabin, and a Circuit Rider called at intervals to minister to them. The rest of the time they read from a book of sermons one of the men had with him. Baptisms then, and after the church was built, took place by groups in the river.

By 1856 their number had increased sufficiently that they were able to build a church. It was thirty-two by fifty feet, with a sixteen foot ceiling, and to the blind and widowed Sarah McDowell was given the honor of naming it. She christened it the "Pioneer Church".

As long as they lived, Sarah's sons considered the Avoca church their personal responsibility, even after they removed to Fairbury. Every Sunday morning at the close of the sermon, the minister would read an invitation from James McDowell, for the entire congregation to go home with him and have dinner. His daughters remembered their Saturdays as long days of baking and cooking, because church people observed the Sabbath strictly, and no work of any kind was done except to care for their animals.

The Avoca congregation was small, of course, and some of the members came from a distance. In good weather, Dr. Lorenzo Beach and his family drove the five miles from his farm in an open wagon. It was an all day trip, and meant leaving his grandson, Ren Dominy, at home to take care of the cows. To make sure the lad did not fritter his day in godless pastimes, the Doctor always assigned him long passages of Scripture to memorize and recite upon his return.

Avoca received its death blow from Octave Chanute's railroad. The buildings were dismantled and moved away, some of them going to the new town of McDowell, a few miles to the west, on the Chicago and Paducah Railroad. Judge Woodford McDowell had the saw mill taken down and shipped to Jefferson County, Nebraska, in 1869, where he had recently bought land. There it became the beginning of a new settlement which the judge called Fairbury, in honor of his home in Illinois.

Of Avoca, only the church remained, and in 1876, this, too, was torn down. A new one, known as the Centennial Church, because it was one-hundred years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, was built across the river beside the little cemetery. It served the community until automobiles and improved roads brought the last of its members to Fairbury. It was dismantled about 1910, and today the only remaining trace of the town of Avoca is the beautiful, serenely quiet cemetery of the church yard, lying beneath its towering trees, on the bank of the Little Vermillion.

CHAPTER V
The Breadwinners

No child who had seen John Coomer ever forgot him. He was better than six feet tall and weighed over three-hundred pounds, but they remembered him chiefly because of his habit of sitting barefooted on the fence in front of his house which was near the depot. The top board of the fence sagged from his weight, and the one beneath it was nearly worn through from his feet, but children and their elders looked at him with respect, for John Coomer was a leading citizen and a financier.

He was known as being "close" with his money, and there was good reason. A son of emigrants, and orphaned in early childhood, he had tried farming in Vermont, among those stony, poverty-stricken hills. He soon gave it up, and made a trip out west to Illinois. Seeing that the country had possibilities for him, he went back to Vermont only long enough to get married.

Mrs. Coomer is remembered as a quaint little woman, as tiny as her husband was large, and not at all stylish. She, too, was frugal. When she was married she had a paper of pins, and when she died she still had that original paper of pins, still full.

As she grew older, Mrs. Coomer's eyesight began to fail. One morning when she was making her husband's favorite pie, she reached to the shelf above her work table for a tin can, and generously sprinkled the apricots with tobacco instead of the usual cinnamon. Coomer told it up and down Main Street that afternoon. He said it was the best pie he ever ate.

Coomer was farming in Avoca when Patton and Chanute made their agreement, and he was one of the first to buy a lot from them.

He was proud of his distinction of having built the first new house in Fairbury, and he had started the first lumber yard. He served as the first postmaster, too, until the Federal Government formally appointed one for the new town.

While he held the position, Fairbury was on the pony express route from Danville to Ottawa, along with Pontiac, Avoca and Oliver's Grove. The Fairbury section was from Pontiac to Lexington,

and a round-trip was made each week. There was very little postal business because of the heavy rates charged, and the post boy was correspondingly underpaid. He rode a fast horse, and he tooted a shrill horn as he entered the village, which was a summons for Mrs. Coomer to run out with the mail bag. This pony express was abandoned at the end of the Civil War, when there were enough railroads to take over the business of carrying the mail.

At the same time Coomer was postmaster, he was also the local station agent for the Peoria and Oquawka Railroad for East Fairbury, and when the founding fathers got around to organizing the formal government of their village, he accepted the presidency of the Village Board, having previously refused the office of police magistrate. Undoubtedly, he considered the magistrate's job far too much trouble for the salary, since the town had no calaboose, and nothing much could be done with the law breakers.

Anyhow, Coomer had other things on his mind. The mines were running full blast, and business was hustling. He sold his lumber yard at a good profit, and decided to let his money work for him at eight per cent interest.

Now, for many years, there had been no adequate laws in Illinois for controlling exorbitant interest rates. English capitalists had speculated heavily in the newly-opened lands, and they and others had been guilty of many sharp practices. When the economy collapsed, the settlers came upon bitterly hard times. Taxes were so high that business and prospective settlers had shunned the state, and for a while, there was not even one bank in all Illinois.

By the time Fairbury was founded, however, eastern capital had begun venturing back into the state, and business was beginning to pick up. Banks were still a matter of private capital, but the government now permitted the larger ones to issue paper money of their own, which was signed by their presidents. These bills were smaller in size than the ones the government issues now, and they were for small denominations, fifty or twenty-five cents. For some reason, now unknown, people called them "shin plasters".

Private money lenders still received high rates of interest, and many pioneers had borrowed money at twenty-five per cent interest in order to secure their farms. The lenders took mortgages on the property, and foreclosed promptly when the time was up, thereby

bankrupting their customers. There were at least three times that one of the Fairbury lenders, Andy Claudon, was chased by a man with a knife. The third time Andy had an axe to defend himself, and the man was jailed, only to turn lunatic from his losses.

Coomer was content to sit on his fence and watch the comings and the goings of his fellow townspeople, but he could smell a nickel from afar, and he never permitted one to get away from him. His frugality began right in his home. He went barefoot around the house to save his shoes, and when the sweet corn season arrived, his children were permitted to eat it with either butter or salt, never both. The coins he saved were kept under his bed in a spare chamber pot. The bills, he tucked between the pages of his Bible. Sometimes it mildewed, and stuck together before there was enough to send down to the bank.

The bank put the money out at loan for him, but he kept a close eye on it. Everybody in town knew when someone owed him, because the day after the loan was made, he would walk down to look things over. He would get himself a chair and sit outside the shop door, counting the customers and calculating how long it would be before he got his money back, for he well knew that "you can't get blood out of a turnip".

From his customary perch on his fence, Coomer watched the little town: the rivalries of the little businesses, the fires and the heartbreak, and he saw it burgeon into a healthy prosperity, evidenced by signs of civic progress.

Under the cut-throat competition, the little businesses came and went, except the Walton brothers, Isaac and Wesley, who had the wisdom and the foresight to consider Fairbury the shopping center of a rural community instead of a mining town, and they prospered accordingly. They even lowered their own prices when the grain markets went down for any length of time, and all the churches and ministers in Fairbury received a special discount on all their goods. Not only that, but the farmers were always certain of a really genuine and friendly welcome at their store. One of the brothers could always stop to chat, and there were plenty of chairs for those who had to wait.

It was the Walton Brothers, with a couple of other merchants, who raised the windmill in Livingston Square, so that the farmers might

water their horses more conveniently. Later, they provided a drinking fountain for the public, and erected the clock on the town hall.

The brothers had begun business at the west end of Main Street, just off Livingston Square, and had grown to occupy four store buildings, each with a different front, but they were all connected in the back. They separately housed their millinery, dry goods, clothing, and groceries. A third brother, Ben Walton, operated the grist mill across the street.

Three times Walton's store was burned to the ground: 1884, 1896, and 1923. The first fire started in the grist mill and leaped across the street to the store buildings. This was one of the occasions when the fire engine broke down, and twenty-two firms were destroyed before the fire burned itself out.

The Walton loss, alone, was one hundred and twenty five thousand dollars. Ben took bankruptcy, thereby ruining a number of farmers who had taken all their grain to him, and he removed to California that same year; but Isaac and Wesley, "Retailers of Everything", bought a new site, and erected a new "Palace of Trade", with show windows lit by gas jets. This new building gave further scope to the brothers, who were already well known for their progressiveness.

As early as 1878, they had introduced a five and ten cent counter, and had begun the delivery of their goods. "Walton Bros. put on the road this week, behind a fine black steed, one of the finest delivery wagons ever seen on wheels in this town. Billy Stevens manipulates the ribbons and delivers the goods with lightning rapidity."

By 1880, a primitive telephone connected their mill and the depot, and, later, the store with the coal mine. They expanded and built a hotel. They introduced a hearse "of tasteful pattern and finish". They gave generously to local charity.

They advertised extensively in the Blade, too. Full-page ads were common, and a number of times they ran four pages; they sent out hand bills to the neighboring communities. One issue of the Blade contained a color chart for their paints which had been laboriously pasted into each separate copy.

They were the leading merchants in Fairbury when, in 1896, they were burned out again. This time the firemen had been up all night with two other conflagrations, and the Walton flames spread so rapidly that they had to call the Chenoa company for help. The Chenoa men had only eight minutes to catch the train, but they did it. They loaded the hose cart on the tender, wedged themselves along side, and the engineer threw the throttle wide open. He managed a mile a minute, and reached Fairbury ahead of time; but the fire had already reached such proportions that all they could do was to protect the other buildings nearby.

The Walton brothers took an eighty-seven thousand dollar loss that time, since only a small part of it was covered by insurance.

Three weeks after this, two full-page advertisements in the Blade announced their temporary removal to their implement store across the street. They had paid spot cash for everything, and the rebuilding began immediately. The Grand Opening of the new "Palace of Trade" was held in September of that same year, with the sincere good wishes of the whole of Fairbury, for they had earned the genuine admiration and respect of everyone.

There was only one time, as indicated by their advertising, that they had got "stuck" in their buying, and that was with the "Memoirs of General Grant".

This book had been published by Samuel Clemens, who wrote under the name of "Mark Twain". General Grant and his wife had so won his sympathy that, as a publisher of the autobiography, he had made them heavy financial advances. To at least break even on the project, his manager hired salesmen to peddle the book from door to door, as was the custom. One of these high-powered men unloaded a considerable part of his stock at Walton's.

At first, these were simply offered for sale; and then, presently, the approaching holidays brought the notice: "Grant's Memoirs all complete in one volume, cloth bound. Just the thing for your boy, only $1 at Walton's."

Evidently the books still refused to move, for there was distinct desperation in: "A volume of Grant's Memoirs goes with each suit and overcoat during the holidays at Walton Bros." A good many bookcases in Fairbury still harbor Grant's Memoirs that grandpa got instead of an extra pair of pants.

(That was the same Christmas that A. H. Mundt, the jeweler, advertised: “The nicest perfect diamond rings you ever saw at $10 to $12.90.”)

Walton’s also offered buffalo robes for winter driving, kangaroo and sealskin shoes for men, as well as Mikado bustles for women. The latter followed the appearance of a Light Opera Company in Fairbury.

Their most sensational publicity venture, however, was the balloons they sent up at the Fourth of July celebration, and again during the Fair.

Attached to the balloons was the guarantee of a new suit of clothes for the finder, and as they drifted away over the town, their progress was closely attended by a crowd of men and boys on foot, bicycles and horseback. The races were close, and the competition was keen, and the whole thing was regarded by everyone as highly successful.

The other stores gave lively competition to Walton’s. Ramsey’s Post Office Store was just around the corner on Livingston Square. It offered tobacco, school and blank books, nice library lamps, the best five-cent cigars in the country, candy and nuts, patent medicines of all kinds, stationery, toys, velocipedes, wagons, croquet sets, Rogers groups of statuary, oranges, lemons and violins to tempt the citizens who came regularly, twice a day, for their mail, as the post office was in the back of the store.

It was a popular meeting place for the young, as well as a social center for the more elderly, and hurried businessmen, trying to wedge their way to the postal window through all the visiting, were driven to frenzy when they discovered that the postmaster himself had stopped for a prolonged gossip. Bitter protests only drew a cold warning: “When you wish for your mail, do not stand opposite your box and pound on the number.”

Any week day was good shopping, but Saturday night was the big time downtown. Farmers brought their wives and children, and sometimes there would be three hundred teams tied to the hitching racks along Main Street. Most people traveled in wagons then, for only a few of the more affluent could afford buggies.

They did their trading and bought their supplies, stopping to chat

with the acquaintances they met. The walks were thick with little knots of people busy exchanging the latest news, for the town people enjoyed the sociability as much as the farmers.

All of the barber shops were full of customers waiting for shaves and haircuts. Hillyer's Barber Shop advertised: "Twelve nice smooth shaves for a dollar". Regular customers had their own private mugs, and these were on display upon a shelf.

The men who shaved every day had their own set of razors at home. They were in a leather case and were all straight edged. They used a different one each day, in regular order, and they kept them in a state of wicked sharpness with that razor strap.

The saloons were crowded. Every chair and bench inside the stores and along the street were filled with men who expected to spend the rest of the evening there, but were ready, on the instant, to be in the front row of spectators in case of a street fight.

Boys of all ages ranged through the town. It was the one night in the week when some of the country boys were able to have any excitement, and they made the most of it.

Sam Fendrick and his brother were each given five cents spending money each Saturday night, but as they had only one good suit of clothes between them, they took turns coming to town. Though the East and West feud had died out, the war of the town boys versus the country boys still flourished. It was strengthened not a little by the fact that there was no law against serving hard liquors to minors, and crowds of drunken boys roamed the streets and alleys.

The warfare between them flourished at such a pitch that a youth was never safe alone, and the marshal was kept busy arresting them. Fred Baird's memory was cherished by most of the country boys, because in case of a dispute, he somehow managed to give them the benefit of the doubt.

Baird was not alone with his sympathies. A Blade reporter who witnessed one such encounter on Main Street, rejoiced that the little townies had got exactly what was coming to them.

There were other gangs of country boys, however, which nearly always included members of Tom Smith's family, from their farm out north of town in the woods along the Vermillion River. They came to town regularly, and, just as regularly, the boys got drunk

and cleaned out the place; and, just as regularly, Tom went down to bail them out.

Once, after they had helped break up a Holiness meeting down in the Arcade Block, and the wearied squire had placed them on probation after giving them still another fine, the indignant minister sternly remonstrated with their father, stating that the Smith boys were just born for trouble.

Tom shook his head in honest bewilderment. He said he simply didn't understand it: his boys weren't good enough to resemble the Smiths, and they weren't ornery enough to take after his wife's folks, the Gilpins.

Rousing fist fights among the gangs were common enough along Main Street, but when they took to assaulting each other with stones, pumpkins, or rotten eggs, and innocent pedestrians were caught in fusillade, the victims were provoked to a wrath which threatened apoplexy.

May 24, 1879 - "It is on the streets at night, uncurbed by proper influences, that the germs of the future criminal are planted. We have seen little boys, scarcely 7 years of age, whooping around the streets at nine or ten o'clock at night, all seasons of the year. Any night, dozens of boys of all ages may be seen tearing around in squads, like a parcel of young Arabs. Parents who permit their boys to run wild on the street, do not discharge their duties to them or to the public. Take warning, and keep your boys at home of nights."

The boys were a particular aggravation to the merchants, too, and on the mornings when the men came down to open their stores and found that there had been an exchange of their signs all up and down the street, they experienced the ultimate in exasperation.

"There are a number of youngsters about town of ages ranging from ten to twelve years and upwards, who are in a fair way to land in the reform school, if not the penitentiary, at an early day."

The "stuffed club" gang was active along Main Street and the alleys, of course, and among its other pastimes, it managed to establish a sort of censorship of adult strangers. If a newcomer opened a place of business which threatened the pocketbook of a gang member's family, he was quickly induced to betake himself elsewhere.

Since there was a gun store in the Arcade Block, there was frequent pistol practice along Main Street by the young bloods, which was a great annoyance to the more peaceful, especially on Sunday mornings.

There was the matter of sling shots, too, and the city ordinance regarding the same, and sundry other weapons, carried a roll and thunder of majestic phrasing which was a reminder that Judge C. F. H. Carrithers, then city attorney, also had little boys of his own.

The ordinance covered everything: "No person shall throw or cast any stone or any other missile upon or at any building, tree or private property, or upon or at any person in any street, alley or lane or public or private place within this village, have or use any sling shot, or sling shot rubbers within such village, under penalty of not less than two or more than twenty-five dollars for each offence. Be it ordained by the President and the Board of Trustees of the Village of Fairbury, that whosoever shall carry, concealed upon his person, any pistol, revolver, derringer, bowie knife, knife, dirk, or any other deadly weapon of a like character, or whosoever shall in a threatening manner display or flourish any such deadly weapon within the corporate limits of said Village, shall upon conviction thereof, be fined not less than $10 nor more than $100."

The stores kept long hours. They were open six days a week from six in the morning until ten o'clock at night. Banking hours were from eight to four o'clock, also six days a week. They observed only two holidays, Fourth of July and Christmas, and when they began to shut their doors over the noon hour on Thanksgiving, it was regarded as an outrageous innovation.

It was not until April, 1909, that they finally chose to remedy this: "The stores close at 7:30 now. If people take due and timely notice of this fact and remember that, they will not have to go hungry or naked if they get up town before 7:30."

The barber shops had led the way. Originally open seven days a week, in 1872 they began the Sunday closings, shutting their doors promptly at eight p.m. during the week. This caused some inconvenience, because a few of them were equipped to offer twenty-five cent baths.

Although their hours were long, there was not always a rush of

business. The store keepers had time to gossip, or to join a political argument, or to stand in their doorways to watch the trains come in or the activities down the street.

Maybe it was somebody doing some sort of a stunt, such as riding in a wheelbarrow to pay off an election bet; or, maybe again, it was a little crowd around a fortune teller on a corner. They watched him closely to see what he really did with his tin box, dice, oil cloth and checkerboard.

Perhaps it was a salesman demonstrating a new style of washing machine out on the sidewalk. It took plenty of muscle to put on a show like that, for the thing was operated by hand. One of them, invented by a native of Fairbury, was a series of corrugated rollers revolving with a double crank action upon an ordinary washboard.

Maybe it was a new beggar. There were so many of them on the street from time to time. Casualties of the war, with one or both legs amputated, they sat alone on a corner of the walk downtown with a tin cup of pencils beside them and held out their hat to every one who passed.

People were sufficiently charitable that sometimes an able bodied man would purposely create sores on his arm, and then go begging from house to house to exhibit them as the reason he was unable to work. Occasionally he ran afoul of a real doctor and landed in jail.

Street fights or a good runaway were always enjoyed. They always emptied the stores and brought everybody on the double.

The stores were popular places to rest a little before the walk home, or to wait for someone. In cool weather the chairs were gathered around the pot bellied stove, with a few spittoons conveniently nearby, and maybe a checker game going.

The things that the stores had for sale were more or less limited. The grocers usually had an abundance, but much of it was raised locally, and it was available only in season.

They did have what have become luxuries now: real maple sugar and syrup from Ohio, and venison shipped in from Michigan.

Prominently displayed near the door was the big bunch of bananas, which were picked off and sold by the dozen, and the huge yellow cheese with a wedge cut out of it, under a glass cover.

In the rear the big wheel of the coffee grinder was visible. Every time a purchase of coffee was made it was freshly ground, and its tantalizing aroma filled the whole store.

Back of the store proper was the room where the eggs and butter brought in from the country were kept, the can of kerosene with the potato on its spout, the barrels of vinegar and molasses. The room was a cold one, and that old saying, “slow as molasses in January”, was no mere figure of speech.

Every owner was king of his establishment. He was visited at regular intervals by traveling salesmen who kept him supplied with the things he stocked. No customer was allowed behind the counters to pick and choose. They were served by his clerks who got everything and knew everybody.

At Christmas time there were a few lemons and oranges, which were regarded with curiosity.

There were never any tomatoes at any time. These were called “love apples”, and were considered highly poisonous.

Some of the more progressive of the grocers attempted to protect their better foods with pieces of mosquito netting, particularly the stuff displayed in open bins and racks on the sidewalks, but their customers raised these so often to see what was underneath, that the nets became fly traps instead.

Protection against the filth-laden dust of the streets, there was none. It blew into the stores in gusts, contaminating the food, for much of it was kept in open barrels where the mice played at night.

The business men finally got together and purchased a street sprinkler to control the dust downtown at least partially. This sprinkler was a big tank mounted on four wheels and drawn by a team of horses. The water sprayed from a low pipe across the back end, and dampened half the width of the street at a time. The merchants found that handbills pasted on the sides of the sprinkler were an effective and convenient means of advertising, and at times it was so bedecked that it resembled a circus wagon.

All in all, the shop keepers might be limited as to the variety of goods they offered, but there was no limit to their flights of advertising in the Blade. They had no professional aid, and each store produced its own copy.

The very names of their stores tended to the lavish: Bradley's Mammoth Dry Goods Emporium, Walton's Palace of Trade, Amsler's Grand Central Dry Goods Store, Bethard's East End Emporium, Jay Tyler's Shaver's Palace, and S. E. Ellis' "Facial Operator and Cranium Manipulator."

The advertising matched the store names:
"If you want a fat time at Christmas, buy your eatables at Perlee's", and "Christmas Nick-Nacks at Beach and Company's Grocery".

"Murder", was a sale headline.
"Little gent's shoes, made just like his pa's, at Walton's."
"Cigars until you can't rest, at Sorg's."
"22 bars of soap with each Boss Washer."
"Cuspidors plain and fancy, at Allen's."
There were Never Rip pants, and a Terror Suit for children.

In the clothing line, boots were $2; ladies muslin underwear, 25 cents; and children's leather stockings, 15 cents; all-wool underwear, 75 cents; work shirts, 25 cents; and handkerchiefs for a penny. Elegant fast black corsets, worth 84 cents, were reduced to 69 cents.

The undercutting of prices, of course, was the commonest inducement offered. Per pound, there was bread at 2 cents; beef, 6 cents; butter, 9 cents; mixed nuts, 10 cents; and wallpaper at 2 cents a roll. Bethard's clothing store, to announce their opening, had a full-page advertisement with two black, life-sized footprints at the top, over the heading: "We are firmly planted in Fairbury."

A little later there appeared:

"The boy stood on the burning deck,
And loudly he did cry -
'Oh, father buy me Bethard's pants,
And death will not come nigh,'
Knee pants, 17 cents at Bethard's."

Phillips, the photographer, did pretty well along those lines, too:

"If you cannot cross the country,
Or the foreign lands explore,
You can spend your money nearer--"

You can spend your money nearer—
And get a likeness that will last
When all the rest is past."

There were special bargains offered, too:
"Twenty-five pounds of sugar for $1,"
"Best flour, $1.10 per hundred,"
"Good calico, 5 cents a yard,"
and
"Four pounds of nails for 10 cents."

Competition was keen. A merchant who cut prices sharply enough to attract attention was promptly matched by his rivals. If he offered premiums or special inducements, they answered with something just as good, or better. The public, of course, reaped the benefit.

The merchants were not above using humor to catch the eye of prospective customers. One grocer announced:
"If you don't trade with me, you will go to the poorhouse,"
while another declared:
"We sell goods so cheap that it hurts."

Traveling salesmen were an important part of the business world. They came regularly with their samples and their stories, and they were welcomed warmly, for they brought news from the outside world as well as merchandise. They stopped at the hotels, gathered in the store offices, and talked far into the night.

The arrival of a new salesman was always an event. He displayed his wares with great ceremony, spread out his samples, and explained their advantages in glowing terms. The merchants listened carefully, compared prices, and placed their orders.

Sometimes a salesman would introduce a new product that created a sensation. The novelty would be discussed all over town, and everyone would come to see it. If it proved successful, other stores quickly followed suit.

In this way the business life of the town moved steadily forward, shaped by competition, cooperation, and the constant search for better goods and better service.

It was Lutie McDowell, Isaac's daughter, however, who was distinctly unique. In behalf of Dr. Rayburn, the local dentist, her hair ornament was the head of a tooth with a gold crown. Her dress decorations were professional instruments, tooth brushes and dental plates, and she wore a necklace and bracelets of artificial teeth.

The Carnival was pronounced a great success.

The merchants of Fairbury were an ambitious lot, and with coal mines at hand, they fervently wished to see their town a manufacturing center. They already had Kring's Foundry, a bed spring factory, Straight's tile factory, Munz's sorghum mill, Clemen's pop factory, Thornton's cider mill, a buggy works, woolen mill, Odell's checkrower and corn planter works, Van Tobel's sash factory, three brick yards, and Conerus' cigar factory. They even had one Chinese Laundry man, but he moved on to Pontiac. Fairbury also had nine barbers and fifteen painters. This was all legitimate business, and making good money.

The largest, most enterprising and prosperous of these belonged to the Odells. Levi Odell, one of the brothers, was a practical inventor, and his corn planter and checkrower proved to be so successful that a small company was formed with several of the local businessmen. It made fortunes for all of them. They might have stayed in Fairbury, if Levi had not invented a typewriter that was much simpler than any of the other early models. It, too, was so successful that they began a selling campaign which extended to Europe, and a part interest was bought by a millionaire who located the factory in Detroit.

John Conerus, who owned the local cigar factory, turned out six-thousand quality cigars a week under various names. There was the "Belle of Fairbury", and "The Blade"; and also "Baldy's Best", made especially for Baldy Eckhart, who ran the Railroad restaurant. "The Park" cigar was to celebrate, in 1899, the removal of the lumber yard from the Commons in preparation for the new city park.

The morning after the last of the lumber had been carted away, signs dotted that desolation of mud and slush. They read: "Keep off the Grass"; "Don't throw stones at the squirrels"; "Animal building to the east"; "Balloon Ascension daily at three-thirty";

“Don’t hitch to the trees”, (there were none, of course) and “Men wanted to run lawn mowers”.

That Depot Park then became the focal point of civic pride. The railroad brought in dirt on flat cars, and filled in the place four feet deep. Trees and flowers were planted, and the women of the village rallied to give a succession of ice cream festivals to raise funds for a fountain.

The garbage dump on the Commons disappeared to form a Sunken Park. The place being low, anyway, it took only a little excavating to make it slightly more so, and thus create a place interestingly different.

The third park, donated to the town by John Marsh, had long been an abandoned weed patch and cow pasture. The only thing the city had done was to enclose it with a picket fence.

Marsh had wasted his fortune in litigation, and after his death the family means became so low his son mentioned several times in public that he would like to have the land back, especially since the city had made no effort to use it.

To his surprise, he met with opposition. The Village Board did not wish to use the property, particularly, but neither did they wish to return it; and so Marsh decided to use strategy, because all that he needed to establish his claim was to move a house upon it.

Unfortunately for Marsh’s plans, an alderman was riding his horse about town, and saw the section of fence laid back. Turning in his saddle, he caught sight of a house being moved down the street. He instantly guessed what was happening, and went to warn the other members of the Board. Once again, a citizen rushed to Pontiac for an injunction while the alderman stood guard at the gap in the fence, and thus Marsh Park was saved for the town.

After this narrow escape, Mayor Ren Dominy had the place cleaned up. A bandstand was built, and for some years the Municipal Band Concerts were given there.

Another great village improvement about this same time was the passing of the corn cribs in town. As a public eyesore, the corncribs gave competition to the village dump, and they moved the citizens to degrees of emotion varying from shame to profanity, and even

sizzling poetry. They were rows of hideous, long, stark buildings of the sinister gray color that unpainted boarding finally achieves in age, and they ranged along the railroad tracks at the east end of Main Street. They belonged to some of the larger land owners, and their purpose was strictly utilitarian, for the storage of grain, since the elevators had no such facilities. The market prices were always much higher in winter when the weather was bad, and these private cribs made it possible for the owner to hold his crops even for two or three years to get top market price. Not only were they unsightly, but they were the visible symbol of the wealth of a privileged few, and furthermore, their shadows innocently gave shelter to some of the questionable activities of the hoodlums of the town. In one instance, a prize fight between a couple of 15 year-old boys was held there one night. It went seven rounds before it was discovered and a humane older person interfered. There was also a gambling den over one of the grain elevators.

As the roads gradually improved, the corn cribs were torn down. The last one caught fire from an engine spark and burned, just after the turn of the century, amid the rejoicing of everyone except the owner.

Yet business is business, eyesores or no eyesores, and grain was the source of income for many people. The fertile land produced heavy crops, but the hauling of the grain to the elevators was seasonal, and it depended on the condition of the roads whether the wagons could get through. When dried sufficiently, there was a rush to get the crops to market, and then sometimes there would be fifty wagons lined up along Main Street, waiting as long as half a day for their turn to unload. Of course, with the influx of grain, the markets would drop.

Since Fairbury had two railroad lines for shipping, it soon became a prominent grain market, and was considered one of the best in the country. The banking house of Bartlett, Beach and Dominy was also a grain brokerage. According to the Blade, in one month, July, 1887, it sold ninety-thousand bushels of oats at twenty-six cents a bushel; and in a period of five months, that same year, it sold two-hundred-thousand dollars worth of corn, sixty-five thousand dollars of it being from the Burr Oaks Farm.

The businessmen had their labor troubles, for, even in a community as small as Fairbury, they had mine strikes that stopped

all output for several months, and raised wages to the extent that the price of coal went up to a dollar a ton. The teamsters of the town also held meetings to arrange the uniform prices they were to charge.

Mr. Edgar Agard, one of the lawyers of the town, became well known in the National Labor Union. Before opening his law office in Fairbury, where he practiced for many years and was an honored mayor, Agard had been a glassblower, and he continued to belong to the Streator Union. After he was admitted to the Illinois Bar, the Union officers often consulted with him, and he laid the groundwork of many of the reforms they achieved. In 1896, he also represented his Union before Congress regarding tariff legislation.

Besides their labor troubles, Fairbury merchants were badly hit by a succession of depressions that brought business failures. 1893 was known as the suicide year, and the Fairbury hotels were overflowing with the creditors. Tommy Beach, senior member of his banking house, walked the floor in his anxiety; and to the end of his life, it was his special pride that no one had ever lost so much as a nickel through him.

Corn prices fell to ten cents a bushel, but, just the same, when a circus came to town at that time, it was well patronized and left two thousand dollars the richer. Evidently, any boy or man would give his last cent to see "Batcheller and Doris's Great Inter-Ocean Circus with a Monster Millionaire Menagerie."

By now, the get-together spirit of the merchants was operating in many ways. As private individuals, they were variously interested in such things as western silver mines and the new market for Nebraska real estate, but they wanted something that would bring a flood of prosperity to the whole of Fairbury.

A project for a steel car works met with enthusiasm, until those interested discovered that the company expected them to raise a hundred-thousand dollars in cash to pay them for the privilege of locating in Fairbury.

They also considered a novelty hinge factory, and a shoe factory.

Then, for some weeks, they were excited by a projected electric railway. The Village Board even held a meeting to grant them a franchise along one of the streets. This company, too, expected

cash; and so this, also, died a-borning.

Finally, a representative of the Marsden Cellulose Company came to town with a proposition to bring wealth untold to every farmer by utilizing his waste cornstalks.

With much fanfare, the drive opened to sell stock. A site for the factory, just out of town, was ceremoniously chosen and bought, and an option taken on some more ground. A Bloomington attorney attended to all of the details.

Scales were installed at the site, an office built for their operator, and the farmers were told to bring on their corn stalks. They came in at such a rate that it took fifteen men and a foreman to handle them. For miles, every field was stripped bare, and when it was all delivered, the whole country side sat back to wait for the money to start rolling in.

They waited. Presently, they began to ask questions, and were aghast when they discovered that the Cellulose factory actually was being located in Owensboro, Kentucky, "where it can be more practically operated." The real reason for the change was that the company had been unable to sell any stock in Fairbury.

It was essentially a farming community, and the stores specialized in serving the farmers. They moved into town when they retired, and the cautiousness of the farmer in all business matters made it an extremely conservative community. They were more than willing to make money on the Marsden Cellulose Factory, but they were unwilling to risk any, and so their great piles of slowly rotting corn stalks remained for years, a monument to aspirations.

In contrast to this, the thing which was destined to bring profound and permanent change in the life style of the village, made its appearance quietly and almost without notice.

It started with the experiments of a couple of scientific-minded doctors who had been reading of the work of Alexander Graham Bell, and then, in 1879, Scibird made an enthusiastic report.

"The best working telephone ever put up in this city connects the office of Barnes and Hudgin with Zimmerman's drug store. The 'masheen' is the result of Dr. Hudgin's mechanical ingenuity, and is one of the best articulators we have ever seen. Words spoken in the

lowest tones at either end of the line are heard with great distinctness at the other end. The connecting line is a good-sized twine cord, and to reach the office above, is zig-zagged around through the building a great many feet, and has six bearings before reaching the terminus above. So perfectly did it work Monday evening that even a whisper in the Doctor's office was distinctly heard in the drug store below."

Several of the more enterprising of the business firms rigged up lines between them, such as the ones which connected Keller's grocery store to Stoller and Irion's, and Walton's Mill to the depot.

The following year saw a Telephone Party: "Last Saturday evening a party of about twenty-five persons gathered at the residence of Mr. A. W. Streeper to hear his telephone work, which extends from his house to the shop. At the house a violin was played, each note of which was distinctly heard at the shop, two or three squares away. At the shop Mr. Powley and Mr. Jones played the coronet, and the music was enjoyed by the party at the residence. After this telephonic musical entertainment, a social dance was indulged in by the party at the house. They had a pleasant time."

Interest in the practical advantages offered by the telephone grew to the extent that a public one was installed in Zimmerman's drug store, to be subsequently removed to Dr. Rayburn's office; but just the same, a hopeful telephone salesman who visited the town at that time, reported that he failed to sell so much as a single instrument.

It was not until 1896 that a telephone line finally connected Fairbury and Pontiac, and it was still another year before a local Exchange with one-hundred subscribers was installed in the Walton Building.

The old telephones, with their elongated receivers and crank bell to call central operator, were a favorite joke of vaudeville comedians, but they were regarded as a miracle, especially on isolated farms where their presence meant instant summons in case of danger or sickness. In town, they not only changed social habits, but they revolutionized the grocery business. It was no longer necessary for someone to make a trip downtown for food. The housewife simply called up her grocer and gave her order. There were four deliveries a day: two in the morning, and two in the afternoon, and the boy brought everything into her kitchen.

It seemed that there were other advantages, too; and the parties on the Avoca Township country line found that their phones were continually out of order. Investigation showed the batteries were dead; but all the batteries that replaced them promptly went dead, too. The line men began an earnest house to house checkup to locate the trouble, and discovered it in the Crumbaker kitchen: Grandma, with the phone receiver tied securely over her ear, sat busily peeling potatoes and listening to all the neighborhood news.

Although they put a curb to this enthusiasm, she dearly loved to listen in, for it was live entertainment, and she indulged her curiosity every time the telephone rang. It irked some of her neighbors, however, and a couple of the men made a bet that she listened EVERY time. To settle it, they pretended to get into an argument about the date on which something or other had occurred. Finally one of them said: "Well, let's ask Grandma Crumbaker. She's always listening in."

Startled to hear her name spoken, and before she thought, the old lady indignantly piped: "You're a liar, Johnny Staulcup!"

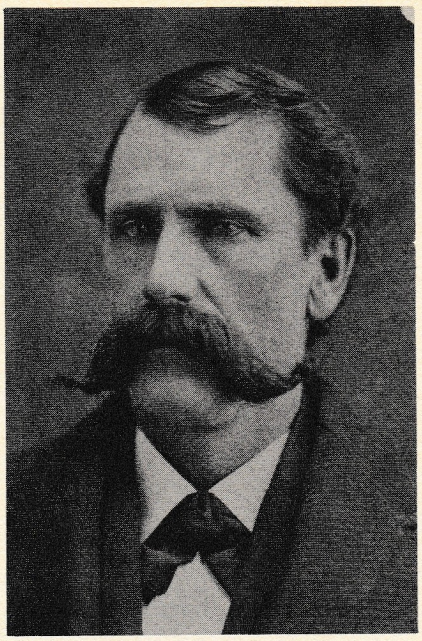
She was caught fair and square, and she knew it, but even that did not stop her, because she had discovered for herself the number one brightener of a country kitchen.

In addition to the other businesses, Fairbury was also one of the three big horse centers of Central Illinois; the other two being Normal and Washington. Outlying farms formed a large breeding and growing district, and Fairbury's monthly community sales drew crowds of buyers. To advertise, the breeders organized frequent parades of the roadsters and big farm horses, which were sometimes led by the Fairbury Cornet Band. At Christmas time they held shooting matches for spans of good work animals.

They organized the Fairbury Driving Association to promote better racing at the Fair by improving the track and offering larger prizes.

The streets of the village were busy with horses. Beside the usual traffic of wagons and drays, the great stallions were exercised near their barns by circling them on a rope. Saddle horses were schooled around the neighborhoods; and the trotters and pacers, pulling their sulkies, trained for the fairs up and down the length of the streets.

Virgin's palatial horse parlors, 1888.



John Virgin

John Virgin was the wealthiest of the dealers, and he made frequent trips to France to buy the fine Norman stock which had been developed in Europe for the purpose of carrying knights clad in heavy armor. Fifteen-hundred dollars was a common price for one of Virgin's horses, and he had a twelve-thousand dollar draught team which he exhibited at state fairs throughout the mid-west.

Virgin's sales barn was the largest and most elaborate in the town. Its "palatial horse parlors" were just off Main Street, on the southwest corner of Walnut and North Third. They were built around a courtyard, which faced the alley and had an open well. The front of the building was brick, with cupalos. At the corner there was a very ornate tower featuring a double roof effect, and a balcony which went around the tower and half way across the front of the building.

In the rear was his livery stable, where horses could be left to be cared for at ten cents an afternoon. For the convenience of ladies waiting for their horses to be harnessed and brought around, there was a private room on the first floor, next to the alley, with its windows properly covered with heavy lace curtains against the gaze

of any inquisitive persons.

At the other side of the building, in the base of the tower, was Virgin's office. This was a very popular gathering place for the men, for it contained an abundance of comfortable chairs, and there were racks around the walls filled with various farm and stock publications. Actually, it was a public reading room for stock men, horse fanciers and farmers.

John Virgin was born in Tippecanoe County, Indiana, in 1838, and came to Illinois in 1855 to farm three-hundred acres in Avoca. During the Civil War, he was Orderly Sergeant, and afterwards he moved to Fairbury where he became postmaster, president of the Fairbury Fair, president of the Farmers Institute, trustee of Illinois Wesleyan University, vice president of the Illinois State Fair, and a member of the committee to choose the site of the Chicago World's Fair.

The Maple Brothers, John and Nimrod, were also prominent in the horse business. They had a store on Main Street where they sold wagons, buggies, and implements, but they were best known for their fine handmade harness. They employed eight harness-makers who made several hundred sets a year, which were shipped to every state in the Union.

Their store was another favorite loafing place of the older men. They sat around the stove in winter, and in the summer time they moved their chairs out on the sidewalk in front of the store window. The glass in the two big windows was the largest in Illinois at the time they were installed, and in one of them always stood a life-sized, dapple grey horse made of wood. It had a mane and tail of real horse hair, and it was wonderfully life-like. It was a Fairbury landmark for many years.

The business had its lighter side, as was natural, and after Andy Claudon had one stolen, the fanciers formed the Anti-Horse Thief Association. When there was no work hunting horse thieves, they held picnics and oyster suppers, and parades of their own. Presently, to help with the detecting, they got themselves a pair of bloodhounds; and so, when Andy's ice box was robbed, they took the dogs for a trial run.

They got as far as Forrest, where they lost the trail, and it ap-

peared the thieves had been tramps who had boarded a freight train. Nevertheless, everybody went home elated over the performance of the bloodhounds.

There was an interval of a few weeks, and then the newspaper carried a paragraph which left the reader to wonder about the emotions of the wives involved: “There is a movement on foot to have the animals turned over to the city and put into the custody of the marshal. They are considerable of an elephant to take care of, and Jim Morris had lost several degrees of piety since he has had them in charge. They have dug up the bushes and trees in his yard, kept him awake nights, and made themselves generally numerous. Jim is patriotic, but he does draw the line on keeping dogs. The matter came up in the City Council Wednesday evening, and was referred to the Judiciary Committee for investigation.”

By this time there was a growing conviction among the members that the dogs were just plain no-account, but it was hard for some of them to admit it when they had helped pay for the animals.

James, Abel Filley’s own son-in-law, had taken one look at them and declared them worthless. Their family arguments threatened to become as noisy as the dogs, and meal times were so vociferous that the young man decided to prove his case once and for all. The time was exactly right, because Filley had just purchased a lovely little mare, Kentucky Lady. Being new, he had not yet tested her abilities, and he was eager to see what she could do.

So, after previously confiding in Mrs. Filley, James and his helper, during the dead of night, led Kentucky Lady from her barn down to Marsh Park. There they wrapped her feet with peppered rags before they led her across town to the Fairgrounds where they hid her in an obscure stall.

There was pandemonium the next morning when Filley discovered he had been robbed. The Anti-Horse Thief Association was summoned, and the dogs were brought. The trail led straight to Marsh Park, and there, unaccountably, it stopped short.

For two weeks the pro-dog faction exerted themselves to solve the mystery, but to no avail. Then there came the day when Filley, convinced at last, made the plain and considered statement that the dogs weren’t worth the powder to blow them up.

The very next morning, to his delighted amazement, he found Kentucky Lady back in her own home stall, sleek and happy from her luxurious sojourn at the Fairgrounds.

The hounds went into permanent retirement.

Every family owned at least one horse, and whatever the amusements Fairburians sought, there was always a horse connected with them, some way or another. They were almost the only means of transportation, and since the very lives of a man and his family often depended on a horse, it was respected accordingly.

It meant much, in a personal way, to the head of the family. It was his status symbol to the rest of the world; and furthermore, it was an example of his personal judgment of horse flesh, and of his adroitness in a horse trade. It took expert knowledge to buy a good horse. After that, it took know-how and elbow grease to keep him in condition. So, it was with justly earned pride that the owner took the reins of a spirited steed and drove him down the street.

A matched team was twice as good, and was prized as was a man's right arm. The morning T. E. DuBois, the owner of the Opera House, went out to his barn and discovered that someone, in the process of the Fourth of July celebration, had clipped the manes and tails of his beautiful driving horses, he was so furious that he advertised a substantial reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the guilty person.

It was a point of honor for a man to have a fast-stepping horse, and the sporting blood of some of the owners ran rich and strong. There was many a private race away from church on Sunday morning, or down the village streets on weekdays, until the marshal got tough and began arresting them. If a man's horse lost, he looked around for a better one to have on hand for the next race; and one way of getting it, without involving too much money, was to trade "with a little boot", meaning to give one animal for a better one, plus a sum of money to offset the differences in values. More often, however, a horse trade was just as much a gamble as a poker game, and just as much fun; such as the time a farmer came to town for the afternoon, traded horses six times, and went back home with the same one that brought him to town.

Whatever horses a man had, however, there was always one in his barn that the women and children could drive. Some of these were

considered beloved members of the family and were kept for years, and the children were permitted to take them out after school. They might all pile on bareback, or, in hot weather, they could take a buggy loaded with their friends out to the country. In winter they had a sleigh, with big coonskin or buffalo robes.

The old Dominy horse, Painter, who lived to the hoary age of twenty-seven years, received the honor of an obituary in the newspaper when he died.

Painter had an adventure not long before his demise: “Three little kids, nine or ten years old, took Dominy’s old family horse from the stable Wednesday morning and did not return him until around midnight. The three rode him pretty much all over the country, and reports from a farmer south of town says that they stole a saddle out of a farmer’s stable to keep the horse’s back from getting sore. Dominy camped in his barn to catch them when they returned, intending, as he said, ‘To make damned good boys of them or poor angels.’ He, however, got tired before the boys did and went home before the horse was brought back.”

If the head of a family was a doting father, his children might have ponies or burros, the latter being especially popular for the littlest youngsters at one time.

The older children all had riding horses, and the girls always rode side saddle. Their riding habits had tight fitting jackets, and long skirts which almost touched the ground when they were mounted, effectively clothing them in modesty. Each girl had two of these habits: a “best”, and a “second best”, and with these they usually wore caps with bills, because their stiff hats, being expensive, were reserved for dress occasions.

Even the young ladies learned a little of the care of a horse, and they were permitted to take them to a blacksmith’s shop to be shod. These were fascinating places to the girls as well as the boys. The buildings were never too well lighted, and the fire on the forge threw curious moving shadows into the dimness, as the blacksmith, in his big leather apron, went about his work. He not only shod the horses, but he sharpened plows and sled runners, and shrank wagon wheel rims as well. He also pared the callouses that often grew between the horses’ knees. There were always at least one or two dogs hanging around the place to snap up the parings, as they considered these a delicacy.

The James McDowell residence on the corner of Maple and Second streets in Fairbury. Ollie Filley on horseback.

In the summer time each blacksmith hired a boy to carry a whisk to keep the flies away from the horses, as it was difficult to work on them when they were stamping. These wisks were made from the tails of dead horses, and some of them were very beautiful with carved handles.

While the girls were allowed to consider a horse from the entertainment standpoint, their brothers were taught to regard them seriously, because, whether they were pets or a necessary means of transportation, they were a constant care and expense.

Every boy grew up with a thorough practical knowledge of horses. He learned to take care of them before himself, to make them do his

One man who had received a beautiful trimming in a trade, discovered that his handsome steed was so fractious that he decided to kill and feed it to his hogs. Then he happened to remember an old school friend whom he had not seen for sometime, and who might be a possibility for a trade. He managed to get close enough to his horse to be able to pour a spoonful of laudanum into each ear, which quieted it so effectively that it behaved like an old plug. It even stood without tying while he opened the gate.

It was a good seven miles out to the friend's farm, and it was dinner time when he got there, but, in spite of the rural laws of hospitality, he was not asked to come in. This flagrant discourtesy provoked him to the extent, that when they got down to the trading, he hoisted the price considerably, and, to his very great surprise, his first offer was taken. Evidently, his friend's conscience was bothering him.

Some days later, he heard what had happened after he left. The effects of the laudanum were wearing off by this time, and when the new owner tried to ride it, the horse pitched him over a fence. He

decided that maybe it wasn't a riding horse, after all, and so, when he had caught it again, he hitched it up to a buggy, and got all his family aboard to make a trip to town. The horse reared impressively a couple of times, and then it plunged straight through the framework of the windmill, leaving the family and buggy fragments strung along in its wake. That time the horse really did provide a banquet for the hogs.

In the meantime, the railroads played their part in the prosperity of the town, and the life of the villagers was paced by the arrival and departure of the trains. By 1875, there were twelve passenger and numerous freight trains every day, and the evening trains met there at nine o'clock.

In the days of the Paducah Road, when Fairbury had three railroad stations, each railroad used the ground floor of a hotel for waiting and baggage rooms. One of them, the Fairbury House, in East Fairbury, had a long wooden platform from its door to the edge of the track. It was built completely across Paducah Avenue, and necessitated a detour for any one going down the street. It was a great convenience, however, for the train men who lived at the hotel, and the girls used to sit on the edge of the platform to wave at the engineers as the trains went by.

After the Fairbury feuds ended, and the Paducah road had been sold, the railroad officials and the citizens got together to build one frame, central depot. It had separate waiting rooms for the men, where they might smoke; and one for the ladies, where they could not, but men were allowed to sit in there if they accompanied a lady.

This new depot also had a long wooden platform which was lit by oil lamps. They exploded sometimes, scattering flaming oil, and it took quick work to keep the place from burning down.

The station platform was a favorite loafing place of the men and some of the town toughs. Feminine passengers were often severely shocked by the loud talk and profanity, and if the girls were pretty, they were apt to have the additional annoyance of receiving “mash” notes delivered by small boys.

These boys infested the place. On fine spring days they skipped school to play marbles there, but in all seasons their favorite sport was to mount the steps of the passenger cars and ride the short dis-

tance to the mines. Out there, they would play around until there was another train coming back. The boys were so numerous, and they were so ill-mannered and determined in their jostling of all the passengers on every train, that it was most difficult for anyone to get on or off a coach. Moreover, the smaller boys climbed the engine, rode the cowcatchers, and harried the train men until the railroad officials forcibly broke up the practice.

In fact, Fairbury was already known far and wide, up and down the land, and for another very good reason. Passenger trains stopped near the edge of town for coal, and then, as they began moving again, the brakemen went through the coaches bawling: “Fair-bur-ree! Fair-bur-ree! Pull your windows down! Pull your windows down!”

The regulars complied immediately, but the innocents who wondered what all the fuss was about, and hesitated until the train had reached the depot, were caught smack in the face with a well-aimed pie.

The supplies came from the Railroad Restaurant, and blackberry or raspberry were preferred as they were the most spectacular, but any kind would do. If pies were not obtainable, having been eaten or because their funds were low, a brush full of paint or white-wash was almost as good, or a stick with a blob of “car dough” on it. “Dough” was the hard grease from the wheel boxing of the railroad cars, and it was almost impossible to remove, especially from a luxuriant set of whiskers.

Sometimes, if all the passengers were wary, all of the car windows remained closed. Then the McDowell boys staged a spectacular fight, with much shouting and arm swinging. Human curiosity could stand just so much, and so the windows went up, and heads popped out to see what was going on - with horrible results. In a few minutes the train would depart with its luckless passengers, to spread the word afar, their feelings in no way mollified by the howls of laughter from the depot loafers. It all was long, long before the movie comedies, but the McDowell boys were artists in their own right. Any face, man or woman, appearing in an open train window was well decorated, and a female passenger, attired in a smart new bonnet and dress, and expecting to meet genteel friends at the end of her train ride, was guaranteed to go into a fit of hysterics that would last until she reached her destination.

The McDowell boys also operated separately. On one occasion, Elmer was drunk when he wandered into the Railroad Restaurant, which was adjacent to the station, a little before nine o'clock, when the evening trains met. There were no customers, and the night cook was asleep on the couch. Baldy Eckhart, the owner, kept the couch under his counter, so that his night cook might rest until his services were needed.

Elmer tied the watchman to a chair, and then he gathered up all the rolls he could find, poured water on them, and threw them at his unfortunate victim.

The cook was awakened by the racket, but he remained hidden, having no desire to participate.

The next day, after Elmer had sobered up, he came around to ask what the damages were.

There were other hazards to railroad travel, and winter storms brought fresh worries, since they had no snow plows for their engines, and any drifts on the track had to be shoveled off by hand. The drifts along the Chicago and Paducah track were sometimes from four to seven feet deep and ran for four miles or more. Just one such drift took twenty-seven men twenty-four hours to dig it clear, and sometimes it was days before a train could get through. Trains were often snowbound all night, and rescue parties had to go out with bobsleds from nearby farm houses with food and fuel. One of the first groups of such stranded passengers managed to keep warm by smashing and burning the car seats. Nevertheless, the crews had their fun along with their worries, and one freight train went through town with a snow man, dressed in an old coat and smoking cap, riding on top.

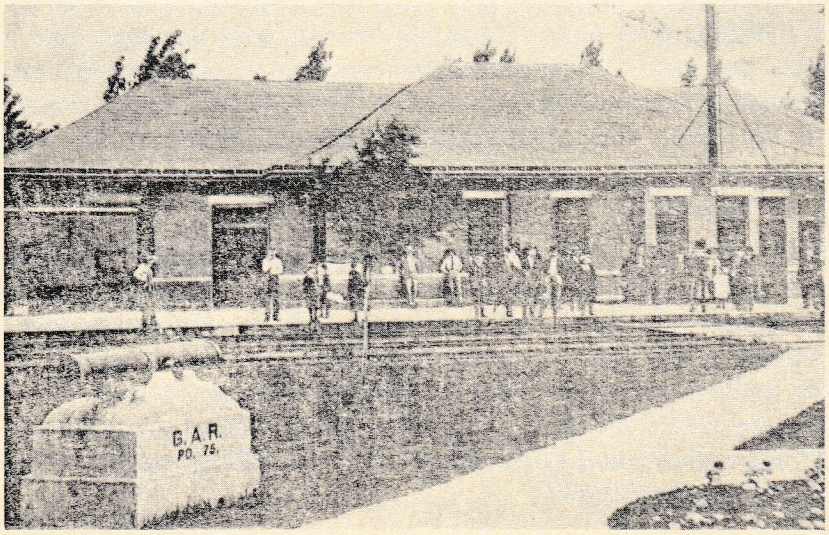
February 5, 1885: “One of the greatest blizzards since 1866, has raged over Illinois the past week. For seven days there were no trains on the T.P. & W., and every man and boy who can handle a shovel have been employed by the Wabash to shovel snow, and many walked from this place to Forrest to assist in getting the passenger trains out of the drifts. The storm started with thunder, lightning and rain and finally turned into a terrific blizzard, drifting the snow housetop high.”

On excursion days, when passengers got round-trip tickets at

especially attractive rates to various points of interest, the trains were jammed to the doors. The Chicago World's Fair was regularly featured, and when the new Nebraska Territory was opened up, the real estate operators not only got their prospective customers reduced rates on special trains, but they also refunded the fare if a purchase was made. They offered nearly three million acres of land for sale, with eleven years to pay.

The Chatsworth wreck, thirteen miles east of Fairbury, was among the worst in railroad history, and it resulted from an excursion to Niagara Falls. Returning home, a grass fire had weakened the wooden supports of a bridge, causing it to collapse when the double header train went over it. The flimsy wooden coaches smashed into kindling as they tumbled down the embankment, killing a hundred people outright, but with hundreds of others left wounded and dying. All of the Fairbury doctors, and many helpers, went to give assistance that night.

When the frame depot of Fairbury was eventually replaced by a pretty little red brick station, the town, led by Dr. Rayburn seized the opportunity for a city park. A fountain was installed, grass sowed, flower beds planted, benches set out, and now, at long last, the town could point with pride to the south side of Main Street.



The new depot showing a portion of the park with the Civil War cannon.

There was a flag man, too, at the railroad crossing on Third Street. He was a retired T.P. & W. Railroad man, and he had a little “shanty” just big enough for a straight back chair and a little stove. By day he waved a red flag when the trains were coming, and by night he swung a lantern.

The new depot was a respectable place, for the police watched it closely. Loafers were discouraged, drunks were jailed, small boys were in school, and so the depot became a social center.

Well before train time, the travelers, suitcases in hand, gathered to purchase their tickets at three cents a mile, and take seats in the waiting room, anxious to see who else was going away.

There were always a number of traveling salesmen, and the Fairbury Hotel porter who met the trains with his cart to get the baggage. The morning passengers were usually the shoppers and business men, generally bound for Peoria. In the evening, all along the line, the larger social functions were timed to match the train schedule, and a good part of the passengers’ fun was the train trip to get there.

The reporters from the newspapers were busy inside the depot and on the platform, checking on the comings and goings. There was no chance that a trip for private business or pleasure could go unnoticed or unannounced to the town. Their questions could be annoyingly personal, but any objections to answering them all made a reporter even more insistent.

When the time for the train drew near, the mail bags arrived on the post office cart. The baggage truck was pulled to the edge of the platform. The passengers rushed to take their places beside it, and stand looking down the tracks, waiting for that deep whistle from the distance.

As the trains came into Fairbury, they stopped at the chutes of the mines to take on coal, and let the miners ride into town. East of town, opposite that mine, was the water tower with a long spout which swung over to replenish the tank of the engine. When it was filled, the engineer gave a blast of the whistle to signal the men at the station, and moved his train slowly into town. There was no point in getting up speed, because the city ordinance specified six miles an hour through town, under pain of a twenty or fifty dollar fine.

Then the rolling smoke from the stack of the approaching locomotive became visible, and the train, with bell a-ringing, came to a halt beside the depot in a blast of steam. Mailbags, express boxes and luggage were thrown off, as the conductor jumped down from the coach with his foot stool to help the travelers alight.

The traveling men were first to leave or board the train, and they always went straight to the smoking car where they could talk and be comfortable. The women and non-smoking males sat in the other coaches. The double red plush seats were reversible, making it possible for four people to sit together; and, come dusk and getting dark outside the windows, it was cozy when the brakeman came through to light the kerosene lamps overhead, and to poke up the fire in the stove at the end of the car.

Summer ventilation throughout the trains was regulated from the individual windows, regardless of the discomfort of the luckless individuals sitting nearby. The windows, perhaps purposely, were difficult to raise and lower, a fact appreciated by the young men, for the common wolf approach was to offer to assist a girl with her window. The thick smoke and cinders which came in on the gale were of no moment, for a layer of soot was accepted as part of the train ride, and the mark of distinction of having been out of town.

CHAPTER VI
Medical Men

In 1878, the tiny town of Fairbury and its scanty rural population had no less than seventeen doctors. Among these were Doctors Barnes, Brewer, Fraley, Pearson, Ostrander, Bartlett and Hudgen. Also, for a short time, there was a H. R. Wood, who advertised himself to be a Homeopathic Physician; Dr. J. W. Witmire, Specialist in Chronic Diseases of Women and Children, and a scattering of magnetic healers and osteopaths as well. Fairbury was more fortunate than most towns because of its dedicated physicians, but it had its full share of the other sort, too.

The Blade valued their activities as a source of news, and each accident was reported in full, the name of the doctor given, and his procedure explained. Interesting illnesses were described in detail, together with a description of the treatment by the attending physician; so, whenever Dr. Barnes operated for a tumor, he bottled it and invited the public to his office for a viewing.

The Blade also mentioned with awe the woman who had all her teeth pulled at one sitting. That was another service the doctors advertised. It was twenty-five cents a tooth, without pain killer.

The reports of accidents were frequent, for a hedge knife or scythe, both in common use, could cut the artery below a knee, or lay open the palm of a hand. Axes, used in felling trees and chopping kindling, caused many mishaps. Fingers and beards caught in the gearing of machinery; and there were always the run-aways and casualties with horses. Gunshot wounds in hunting, and otherwise, were also frequent, and the Village Board passed an ordinance to provide a heavy fine for the "carrying of sling-shots and other dangerous weapons" within the village limits. The ordinance was seriously intended to reduce accidents, and was not the piece of humor it might appear, for one sure source of business for the doctors was the patching of the battle wounds of the drunks.

Now it should be carefully emphasized that the sanitary conditions in Fairbury at that time were common in all the towns throughout the new territory. The town was not a unique pesthole to be singled out as a horrible example. In fact, it was considered a fine place to live. Above all, are to be remembered the steady progress-

ion of medical discoveries since then, and the services of the physicians themselves, who gradually educated the general public to accept modern health standards as common-place.

A well dressed Fairbury physician of 1866.

In 1877, the State of Illinois created the State Board of Health, and so, with the law behind them, the physicians of Fairbury went to work on the town. Wells were cleaned, and covered; the slaughter and poultry houses were made to clear up their premises; a vigorous warfare was waged to exterminate the rats. The doctors got an ordinance passed providing heavy fines for the dumping of garbage or dead animals along the roadside; and provided a pest house to isolate the victims of dangerous contagious diseases.

Working toward their goal of universal smallpox vaccinations, they were so in earnest about it, that Doctor Brewer vaccinated one girl for the third time, after the first two failed to "take". With the last, all three innoculations became effective, making her extremely ill.

Those early vaccinations were a formidable proceeding. Using his surgeon's knife, a doctor scraped a half-inch square patch of skin on the left forearm. After it had been innoculated, a transparent cup was taped over the spot. It gave a clear view of the horrendous scab which developed beneath it, which had to be left undisturbed until it loosened and dropped off of its own accord. The scar it left was impressive and all too visible.

One doctor, disliking the appearance of these resulting scars on the female form, considered himself particularly progressive when he vaccinated his own daughter upon the calf of her leg, where he thought it would never show. He never dreamed that women's skirts would go up and stay there.

The doctors got quarantine laws passed, and they were adamant about them. Every youngster who had a child's disease, had a big red sign displaying the name of it nailed on the front of his house by a member of the Board of Health. When he had recovered and all danger of contagion had passed, and the house had been fumigated, then, and then only, could the sign be taken down and the family go outdoors again.

The doctors had prizes given to the school children bringing in the most dead flies, and the teachers gave impressive lectures to the scholars about the germs each one carried.

The doctors caused signs to be posted up and down Main Street, every few feet: "$5.00 fine for spitting on the sidewalk". Since at

least two men out of three chewed tobacco and spit at random, the male adults of the town came upon difficult times.

When Doctor Sam Barnes became mayor in the 1890's, sewer pipe was laid in the old ditches to drain the town, and they were filled in; and the Blade came out with a strong editorial advocating federal pure food laws. The Fairbury merchants purchased a large horse-drawn water tank to sprinkle the more important streets and lay the summer dust; and the Walton Brothers were lauded as public benefactors when they installed an ice-cooled drinking fountain with two spouts.

The Blade played a large part in the professional life of the doctors. Each issue carried the column of their advertisements; but the announcements of the new babies they brought into the world appeared only irregularly. Apparently, they "saved up" until their list could make an impressive showing. The doctor's name, in large type, headed this item. Below it, in smaller print, were the names of the happy parents and the babies themselves.

The pioneer doctors had great respect for their profession and dressed to accentuate their dignity. High silk hats were always worn, and in winter they put a shawl about their shoulders, as Lincoln did, and many carried canes. Every doctor wore a knee length, single breasted coat, usually of broadcloth, and called a "Prince Albert", so named in honor of Queen Victoria's consort, who had made them popular. The pants were without a crease, because a crease was considered a wrinkle, and therefore most unattractive. It indicated that the pants had been lying on a shelf instead of hanging properly in a wardrobe. No man who even pretended to any style ever wore creased trousers.

A doctor's vest enhanced his suit, and often was of rich brocade material. Across it, in a double loop, hung a heavy gold watch chain which had a massive fob on one side, a watch tucked into a little pocket on the other, and the center fastened into a buttonhole.

The watch itself was as big and fine as his purse would allow, with gold preferred. There was a quiet flourish in the way a doctor removed it from his pocket and held it in the palm of his hand. A flick of his thumb made the lid fly open, and then he was ready to count the pulse.

Finished, and the watch put away, the doctor always depressed the patient's tongue with a spoon handle, and told him to say: "Ah-h-h-h." Following that, the doctor was on his own.

Bedside manner was of primary importance, and hand-in-hand with this was the appearance of age and experience, so necessary to reassure the patient and his family. Consequently, every doctor wore some style of beard, as did nearly every other male who could sprout a whisker.

There were no hospitals of any sort. Operations were performed on kitchen tables. They used the light of candles or kerosene lamps if it was at night; or if the weather was fine the table might be taken out of doors. The clouds of flies, drawn by the blood, were too common to notice.

Confinements were in the home, with the patient in her own bed; and the doctor, assisted by a neighbor lady, stayed with her throughout the labor. Babies by the score were named for him.

The profession was a hard and dangerous life, even by frontier standards, for a doctor risked his life every time he set foot inside a cabin door. During the frequent epidemics he worked the clock around, never resting until the disease had been brought under control.

If there was no nurse to be had, the doctor took care of the patient himself. They were the finest nurses of all.

There was always the fear, too, that he might carry the contagion home to his own family. There were times when a doctor undressed in his barn, burned his clothes, and washed himself down with antiseptic before entering his home.

There were other hazards, also, not to be mentioned in polite society. Sometimes he had to go out to a house well and draw water to heat so he could give his patient a very necessary bath before he could treat him; and since the patient was at home and in his own bed, the Doctor often sat upon it in his ministrations. Later, his luckless wife might discover that he had unwittingly brought away lice or bedbugs.

Lice were deeply hated, but it was the bedbugs that drove a housewife to undreamed of frenzy. Prolific beyond belief, the bugs

laid their eggs in the crevices of a bed, which had to be completely dismantled and gone over with the minutest inspection. If just a few tiny eggs remained to hatch, it soon had to be done all over again. Not only were the bites painfully annoying, but the bugs themselves were all too easily carried to other parts of the house. They were ranked with the seven plagues of Egypt.

Medical practice was a rugged life, and, to keep going, some of the weaker doctors took to drink, especially during the Civil War when so few physicians were left for the people at home; and there were instances of women permanently injured in childbirth because of a drunken doctor.

The rest of the doctors stayed on their feet with strong coffee. Their practice was in a country of widely scattered homes, reached by worst possible roads, on horseback or by buggy, in howling weather, day or night. The practice of the Fairbury doctors had a radius of twenty-five miles.

All too often, a doctor would reach his home after an all-night trip, in a storm so bad that all he could do was to give his horse its head to find its own way home, only to discover a man waiting for him with an emergency call, to a house just a mile or two further down the very road over which he had just come. Sometimes a single case would take all day or night, or even both. For this, Dr. Cicero Bartlett charged fifty cents a call.

The good doctor always made his own interests secondary to the needs of his patients, and as a result he was given implicit trust, with full appreciation of his skills. Each one of his patients was well known to him, and his practice was based on personal friendship and interest.

Such a doctor was a man of deepest sympathies. He witnessed such terrible sorrow, such quick tragedies. His patients felt a personal love and dependence on him, for his help extended far beyond his medical aid.

If a doctor's life was a hard one, it had its compensations. The long drives he had to make were times of contemplation, and a renewing of spiritual forces. They were times to enjoy nature, the changing of the seasons, the sunsets and sunrises, the birds and animals, even the beauty of the storms. They were times to think, and pray. He was tired, to be sure, but he was not fighting traffic in

Human nature is always human nature, however, and once a patient had taken his medicine and found himself cured, he was sometimes seized with a cramp in his wallet.

Like the newspaper editors, the doctors learned to expect a portion of their payment in surplus produce of various kinds, such as a can of lard, a dozen eggs, or a couple of chickens. Once, for an operation, Doctor Lewis received a large amount of honey in the comb. There was no place to put it, except in his attic, and when the hot weather came, the stuff melted and ran down into the rooms below, causing damage far in excess of the original bill.

The medical men expected slow payment, but they were reasonably firm about getting it eventually, and every December the newspaper carried their advertisements: “All those knowing themselves indebted to me, will please call and settle up before the close of the present year.” Some of the business men used this method, too.

On the whole, the pioneers were fatalistic about sickness, accepting it as an act of God in punishment for sin.

They had typhoid, naturally.

And they had tuberculosis. They called it “consumption”. There was “quick consumption”, and “galloping consumption”. The terms were a measure of the speed with which one died.

They had cholera morbus, and cholera infantum (grown-ups and babies).

They had outbreaks of small pox, and of scarlet fever and diptheria, terrifying for the frequency with which they killed.

Laryngitis was serious, and sometimes fatal.

There were epidemics of measles and whooping cough. Children died of these every winter. Nevertheless, they believed, doctors and parents alike, that the children’s diseases were inevitable, and it was considered best if a child could have them all while young, and be finished with them.

Even a scarlet fever epidemic failed to worry them very much. In 1889, it closed the Fairbury schools, but the Methodists went right ahead, anyway, with their social to raise money for a new organ.

In malaria season, the pioneer wife organized her housework to fit the alternating days of “shakes and fever”. She cooked enough for two days when she was feverish, but able to be up and about, and then she could take to the comfort of her bed on the following day when she was shaking with the chills.

In general, there were three kinds of pioneer doctors. The Allopaths believed in “bleeding, blistering and purging”. People said that their victims died of the cure.

The Homioapaths, on the other hand, “let nature take its course”. Their patients died of the disease.

People became so violently partisan about the two medical systems that a third one developed. This was the Eclectic System, or “People’s Doctors”, and it was based on the democratic frontier principle that one man’s opinion was as good as another’s. They claimed to be proficient in both methods, and allowed their patients to choose the treatment they preferred.

The three schools held one belief in common, that serious ills demanded drastic action. However, it was particularly noticeable with any of the systems, that the methods of the frontier doctors were far more extreme and inventive than those of the physicians who had been educated in the East.

The commonly accepted way to become a Doctor of Medicine then, was to “read” for two or three years with some older, established member of the profession. The apprentice washed medicine bottles, scoured the brass pans of the counter scales, swept out the office, cared for the horse and cow, and made himself generally useful. He also attended the Doctor on his round of calls, assisted with the patients, and drove the horse while his senior caught a much needed nap.

In return, the Doctor gave him lessons and advice. There was no pay for the first six months, but he was given his board and room and every opportunity to learn. In the third year of his apprenticeship he was taught to make up prescriptions, tinctures, elixirs, pills, plasters, ointments and salves.

At the end of it, the aspirant could attend a medical school. There were dozens of these schools in Illinois following the Civil War. All of them offered two terms of sixteen weeks each, with identical

lectures for both terms, and they gave diplomas to their graduates.

Any man in Illinois who wished, however, might become a doctor by simply hanging out his shingle. It was said that the only diagnostic equipment needed was the five senses and a stethoscope. The instruments they used were commonly unsterilized. The more fastidious doctors boiled them, but most washed them off with soap and water. Some, however, did not bother with all that, and wiped them off with the first bit of cloth that came to hand, sometimes their own pants or coat-tails.

From the time of the very first settlers, when it was too difficult to procure a doctor, people turned to their neighbors. Certain kindly women went about helping the sick and distressed; and for years they doctored whole neighborhoods with their home remedies. Many of them considered their own knowledge superior to that of the doctor's. In some cases, they were right.

They, too, ran incredible risks of contagion, as in the case of Mrs. Will Fugate. She attended a strange woman who was not expected to live, and from her she caught the "black erysipelas". Her own head became "as big as a bucket, and her husband put his foot down flat: 'Never again for anybody!' "

As the doctors and their patients became more numerous, a class of practical nurses developed. It was one of the few accepted ways a woman might support herself, and it took very little training. Often she had taken care of a relative, and so had a general idea of how to care for a sick person. She came into the home, and helped cook the meals and do the housework, as well as take care of the patient.

The doctors themselves said there were three classes of these practical nurses; first, there were the large, muscular women who were able to lift heavy people. "Big and dumb." Then, there was the Pollyanna type who felt called to cheer up the sick room, and sometimes made the doctor long to choke her. Last and best, there was that God-send, a nurse who used her head as well as her hands, who followed the doctor's orders exactly, and held her tongue.

One of the most beloved of the early physicians was Doctor Chauncey Ostrander, who is chiefly remembered now for the brilliancy of his tall tales, many of which have become classics. The doctors made a special point of telling a good joke. It helped alleviate the terror and pain.

Doc Ostrander was born in the Grand Duchy of Baden, Germany, in 1818. He was the youngest of four children, and when he was five years old the family immigrated to Poughkeepsie, New York.

He was only fifteen when he lost both his father and mother by smallpox within a few days of each other, and the orphaned children were cared for by the Methodist congregation.

The boy studied medicine there with an established physician, and then started west on foot in 1836. All his belongings were with him: one extra shirt and one pair of socks. Fortunately, he encountered a kindly family in a covered wagon, and they took him as far as Michigan. From there he made his way to Chicago, where he graduated from Rush Medical College.

The following year, he was appointed Assistant Surgeon in the United States Army, and was sent to Florida during the Seminole War. When he returned, he practiced in Chicago for nine years, during which time he married Miss Jane Holland of New York State. She was a wise, quiet, good woman.

Doc's eighty-acre farm near Avoca was undoubtedly a government grant for his war service, and he made his home there until his later years, when he moved to Fairbury and opened an office.

He was short and chubby, with a round, beaming face ringed with white whiskers. His head was bald, with a halo of white hair which habitually erupted into tufts beneath his high silk hat, and he was always well dressed in black, with a long-tailed coat, cape and gold headed cane.

Doc's memory wears an especially deserved laurel wreath, for among those prolific pioneers and their primitive sanitation, he delivered nearly three-thousand babies, among them forty-four sets of twins and four sets of triplets.

Doc was a Presbyterian, an Abolitionist, a Republican and a Prohibitionist. He was also an ardent American, and, since he never did anything by halves, he created a sensation during the Spanish-American War by painting his house a bright red, white, and blue. The pickets of the fence which surrounded it, tastefully alternated the colors.

Doc did tell wonderful tall tales, and people do remember him for these, but there are also those who revere his memory with the

deepest love and gratitude. He and his wife were childless, but they adopted eight children, and raised and educated them as their own. Doc always had an especially warm heart for a homeless child.

There were no public welfare agencies then, and all too often the death of the father meant actual poverty for the survivors. If the mother was taken also, relatives or kindly friends received the children into their homes and raised them as their own.

That was in Fairbury, where everybody knew each other, but back east, where it was much more heavily populated, the orphan asylums and the county poor farms all too often combined shelter with inhuman treatment. When the institutions became over-crowded, the children were shipped into the Middle West to become indentured servants. It was the age of child labor, and there were no laws to protect them.

"A company of children, boys and girls, aged from nine to fourteen years, from the New York Juvenile Asylum will arrive at the Phoenix Hotel, Pontiac, March 18. Anyone desiring to, can take a child into their home on trial, promising the children will be indentured until of age. Hand bills regarding the venture may be seen at the post office."

Dr. Brewer, another favorite physician, and a graduate of two Chicago Medical Schools, was a native of Ohio who came to Fairbury in 1876. His office was over Walton's store, and twice he was burned out in their fires.

He had a bald head and a long white beard, but he was tall and erect to the very last, and he always gave the impression of immense strength. Indeed, he had begun his medical career as a prison physician, and while there he had quelled, unarmed and single-handed, a riot of fifteen men.

He habitually went without a coat or hat, save in extreme weather. His neighbors, just by watching him set out for his office of a winter morning, could judge the temperature. At ten degrees above zero he put on a hat. At ten degrees below, he added a light jacket.

He was a popular physician, and the Blade once reported that he had made forty-six calls in one day.

He first advertised himself a Homeopathic Physician, presently added that he also pulled teeth, and finally announced himself a specialist in women's diseases.

To his patients, he was kind, but firm. He told it, himself, that he gave bread pills to the ladies who had become chronically addicted to the idea of medicine, but had nothing whatever the matter with them.

One patient found herself so benefited by the medicine he prescribed for her, that later, when she became sick again, she returned to his office and asked for some more of it. She reappeared a few days later and confessed, a little uncertainly, the medicine hadn't seemed to help her so much this time.

Doc gruffly replied he hadn't thought it would, because she had something altogether different the matter with her. He fixed her some new medicine, but when she took out her purse to pay him for it, he waved his hand in dismissal. He said he didn't charge patients who did their own prescribing.

Dr. Brewer was in active practice over 60 years, nearly all of the time being spent in Fairbury. He was over 90 years old when he died, in 1933, from an accident which caused the fracture of his hip.

Dr. Fraley was also a native of Ohio, and he, too, was tall. He had a prominent chin and a long, hooked nose, and, later in life, after he had lost his teeth, these nearly touched.

He was summoned one time, when a laundress fell on the sidewalk outside of Dominy's house, and cut her foot so badly it would take several stitches to close it. Doc sent back word that he couldn't come, because he had to help his wife seed cherries.

A doctor was not called for a trifling illness. Their business was with life and death, day and night, with no office hours, no Thursday afternoons off. Many people feared the medicines and treatment as much as they did the disease, and so he often was not called until the patient's condition had become truly serious.

Another reason for the reluctance to summon a physician was because there were no telephones, and the only way they were able to call one was to drive the family horse all the way into town, and then, perhaps, find him out on another case. It made one "think twice".

Moreover, a doctor's office was scarcely a reassuring place for a nervous person to wait. There was no receptionist, but the door was left unlocked, and a sign on it indicated when the doctor thought he might be back. In the meantime, anyone was at liberty to sit down in the waiting room in the company of the desk and safe, and the human skeleton which hung in a corner. There were a few chairs for the patients, a framed diploma, if the doctor had one, and a chart or two of the muscular and nervous systems of mankind.

Back of this room there was another where some of the patients were taken to be treated privately; and still another, smaller room which served as the doctor's dispensary. It had shelves of medicine bottles, scales, and his mortar and pestle. The doctor's compounds were his own. He made the medicines and capsules himself, jealously guarding his recipes.

The doctors had plenty of competition with their medicines. Before the American Medical Association enforced a housecleaning in the patent medicine business, every drug store stocked a profusion of these "sure cures".

There were the "medicine shows" also, that traveled about the country. These were especially enclosed wagons with a little platform in the back, and were pulled by a horse. They stopped at a prominent corner in town, gave a little entertainment, and then sold their bottles of "medicine" to whatever crowd had gathered. One bottle of their stuff was positively guaranteed to cure any ailment known to man or beast, and what a genuine doctor thought of these peddlers, could not be repeated.

There were even quacks among the medical men themselves. A Doctor Devoe, who resided temporarily at the Thomas House, advertised himself as: "The Surgeon in Chief of the Inter State Association of Expert Specialists. Cures are guaranteed."

It was not just the quacks who advertised positive cures, but some of the reputable men as well, and even in case of cancer. Their professional advertisements appeared as a column in the paper each week, and showed the effects of that competition.

It was doctors like Otis, Thatcher, and Lewis, who bridged the time gap between the pioneer and the modern methods.

Dr. George C. Lewis, from Millersburg, Ohio, was a graduate of

Bellevue Medical College, in New York City. He usually drove a gig, and on his calls to many of the German immigrant families, he took Mrs. Emil Keller with him to interpret. Like all young doctors, he had a struggle to become established. Consequently, he was most happy when a farmer came to summon him: his wife was in labor, and their regular doctor was out of town.

During the drive out to the farm in the buggy, the husband's troubles impelled him to confidence: "Look here, Doc, I've already got six girls, and I sure would like to have a boy this time. Fix it up for me, can't you?"

The young doctor was dumbfounded at this bit of ignorance, but he promised to do everything he could, and no one was more surprised than he, when it really did turn out to be a boy.

The jubilant father was overcome with gratitude, but not to the extent of employing him again, but, a year later, when the two chanced to meet on the street, the farmer seized him by the arm: "You know, Doc," he said earnestly, "We've just had another girl at our house. By golly, after this I'm always going to get you!"

Dr. Lewis had the first real telephone in town, connecting his house and office, and he was the first doctor to have a car. It was the second car in Livingston County, and it was a bright red Remington which could be speeded up to forty miles an hour. It seated four, the two rear passengers entering the car through a door in the back end.

Driving those first cars was a civic responsibility, because a horse, faced with one of them, instantly went berserk, sometimes with calamitous results.

It was possible, of course, to stop the racket of the engine by turning it off, but this necessitated cranking it again, and that was plain, hard work. Moreover, the crank handle sometimes had a nasty way of kicking back and breaking an arm. The alternative was for the driver of the automobile to descend and lead the lunatic horse safely past his car, occasionally at the risk of his own neck.

If a horse turned a buggy upside down in the ditch, the proper thing to do was to sit on its head until the passengers could extricate themselves.

One week of the Fairbury Fair, Doctor Lewis was chugging back

to town when he met a carry-all going home. The family, friends of his, had all been to the fair, and every one of them was in that buggy. Any chinks between the children were filled with groceries. One old white horse was pulling this outfit, and he was plunking along with his nose almost on the ground.

Doc was just congratulating himself that this was once he wouldn't have to lead the animal past, when it happened to flick an eyelash and got a look at what was right in front of him. He snorted, reared, and set off down the road at a rate that must have astonished himself when he thought about it later, and he spilled cargo at every jump.

Doc leaped from his automobile and began pulling children out of the ditch. Every one of them was yelling like a Comanche. Suddenly he espied a sack of sugar that had burst open in the grass, and he snatched up a handful of it, and popped it into the mouth of the nearest child. The effect was magical, and gave him a chance to see if there were any broken bones: so he treated the rest of them the same way. He finally caught the horse, and got them all loaded up again, but he said that ever afterwards he always looked at that old skate with a great deal of respect.

Another major hazard in motoring then, was the driver's reflex to yell, "Whoa!" instead of using his brakes.

Dr. Otis was a later convert to the automobile. On the rounds to visit his patients, he drove a bright red sports Chalmers. Beside him rode his English bull dog, "Sito", (Otis, spelled backwards), who always remained in the seat while the Doctor attended his patients. The car could not have been safer if it had been guarded by a regiment of soldiers.

In contrast to the loneliness and isolation of the farm patients, sickness in town was almost a community affair. Neighbor women trooped in to bring delicacies to tempt the invalid's appetite, and their own favorite medicines to make him well. They stayed to give a hand with the housework, and helped take care of the children. Sick-room equipment, such as a bed pan or a pair of crutches, was freely loaned.

None of them knew such a thing as preventive medicine, unless the evil smelling asafoetida bag they hung about the necks of children to repel germs could be counted as such. There were no

clinics or hospitals, and so every mother was obliged to have a fair working knowledge of first aid and practical nursing.

Some of the remedies they used were universal, and almost ritual. Early every spring people felt "dauncey", when the heavy diet of winter, unrelieved by fresh vegetables or fruits, had resulted in headaches, boils and carbuncles, and so they added sassafras tea to their meals. This was to "thin out and purify the blood", and it was also claimed to relieve rheumatism.

Sulphur and molasses were a stronger dose for the same purpose. In fact, sulphur was considered good for practically everything. Thoroughwort tea, one of the bitterest brews known to mankind, was a favorite for jaundice, biliousness, and to wake up a sluggish system.

Calomel was also used to cleanse the system; and this was in spite of the fact that it was known to contain chloride of mercury compound, which sometimes softened the gums and caused the teeth to fall out.

Ipecac was a favorite to produce vomiting. Castor oil, that household stand-by, was straight from the bean without additive such as cinnamon.

Goose grease mixed with turpentine was used for chest colds. So were onion poultices. For these, the onions were fried, spread hot upon a cloth, and bound around the chest of the patient. A wool cloth went over this, and the whole thing topped with thick blankets to induce a heavy sweat.

A slice of onion was also good for a wasp or bee sting.

Camomile and catnip teas were extensively used, and were soothing to the nerves. The catnip tea was also given to colicky babies, and when the attack was severe, a drop of whiskey was added to it.

"Puny" children got raw cod liver oil. It was the pure fish liver oil with no foolishness. It smelled to glory, and the taste lingered forever, and ever, and ever.

Then there was the salt pork, which was to be found in every home. Salt has great power to draw out impurities and pus, and being on the meat, the amount was practically pre-measured in a

form easy to handle. A piece of the pork was bound over carbuncles. For diptheria, a strip of it was tied around the face from under the chin to the top of the head, and it was worn that way for days.

Salt mackerel was useful to reduce fever.

A sprain was treated with a white of egg beaten with a teaspoon of salt. It was placed on the bandage and wrapped in a woolen cloth.

Every household kept supplies of rags from worn sheets and tablecloths and woolen pieces to be used for sickness or emergencies; and every household kept a supply of their favorite homemade cough syrup on hand.

There was one mother who brewed a particularly efficacious cough syrup from red peppers steeped in vinegar, making a tea “hotter than seven furies”. This was thickened slightly, then flavored with butter and honey.

She was making some of it one day, while a young neighbor boy happened to be in the kitchen. When she had stirred in the honey, she tasted it, and she smacked her lips as though it was most awfully good. He saw her, and as soon as her back was turned, he took a great spoonful of it, and nearly burst into flames!

After several trips to the water bucket, he gasped: “If a feller was to drink too much water, will he bust, or will he overflow?”

One thing about it, the patient never became absent-minded about whether or not he had taken his dose. Pills or liquid, they were big and bitter, “the bigger and more bitter, the better”. They always knew they had taken their medicine, and when the remedy was worse than the disease, the patient was in a great hurry to get well.

Husbands and older children could fight back under some of this, but the babies were helpless. Every woman, married or not, considered herself an authority about infants, and, without a doubt, responsibility for the heavy death rate of little children lay, at least in part, with the fact that everything was tried before they called the doctor.

When a disease reached its climax and the ministrations of the doctor were without avail, everyone knew when the patient had begun to sink, for the street outside was barricaded and spread thick

with straw, lest any noise disturb the sufferer. The whole neighborhood was hushed: children spoke in whispers and went elsewhere to play.

Then, one day, the barricades and the straw were removed, and a bouquet of purple flowers tied with purple ribbons and black crepe appeared beside the front door, the sign of death within the house. Black-bordered cards were printed, giving a short obituary, with the date and hour of the funeral, and these were placed on the counters of all the stores downtown.

A committee of women from the church, for a woman; and of men, for a man, came to the home to wash and dress the corpse for burial. It was placed in a simple casket in the parlor of the home, with garden flowers to decorate it, if any were in bloom. Tuberoses and roses were especially desired for this.

When John Coomer died, the Methodist team went to the home to prepare him for burial. Coomer was over six feet tall, and weighed three-hundred pounds, and so the committee found it hard work, especially as the bedroom was very small.

They succeeded in getting him bathed and dressed in his best clothes, and then they folded his hands upon that mighty mountain of a stomach.

It was the first time one member of the committee had done anything of the sort, and he was shaking with nervousness. As he bent down by the bedside to pick up some article from the floor, one of Coomer's hands slid off and dropped right in front of his nose.

The poor fellow almost died of fright, and his state of mind was in no way soothed when they discovered that the door of the bedroom was too small to move the body into the parlor, where it was to lie before the funeral.

They maneuvered him around, and tried the window. That was too small, too.

They finally got him out, by standing him on his feet, sideways, and pushing him through the door. Then he was rearranged for the services.

It was customary for a friend or relative to sit up all night with the corpse, as a sign of veneration and love. Friends of the family called

at the house to pay their respects. Relatives and friends from a distance gathered for the funeral, and much food was cooked and brought in.

For many years there was never a funeral in Fairbury without a beautiful angel food cake for the mourners from Fanny Caldwell. Fanny was poor, and eggs might be scarce, but she always brought the angel food cake, and attended the funeral.

Other friends of the family saw that the house was straight, meals were served, and the needs of the mourners attended. It was all done with much sympathy and understanding.

The funeral was held in the home. Friends were seated throughout the house on chairs borrowed for the occasion. If there was an overflow, it was the men who gathered in groups on the porch and out in the yard. The family, dressed in deep mourning, was seated at one end of the parlor facing the casket. The minister stood at the head of it to deliver his sermon, the obituary, and the eulogy. At the end of the service, the family bade farewell to their loved one, the casket was closed, and carried from the house to the waiting hearse.

John Cook's hearse was drawn by a matched team of black horses, the driver sitting high up in front. It was black, with purple draped glass sides and six large plumes in beautiful tasseled holders on top. Babies and young children had white caskets, a white hearse with white plumes, and white flowers and ribbon at the doorway.

Death was not only a personal loss, but it was a social obligation. The rules of mourning were laid down in all the books of etiquette, and they were carefully followed.

For women, the clothing, of course, was black. Elaborate dresses were considered poor taste, and "peek-a-boo" waists unthinkable. No velvet, satin or lace were allowed, but all silks were acceptable.

The dresses were extensively trimmed with crepe, and the black bonnets were hung with heavy crepe veils. The white handkerchiefs of the mourners had wide black borders, and even their stationary was bordered in black, and sealed with black wax.

The widow's mourning was distinguished from all the others by

her cap with the crepe veil flowing down the back, and the white ruche around the face. It gave the wearer special protection and respect from everyone. For a grown son or daughter, the mourning cap was worn without the ruche.

Deep mourning for close relatives was worn for one year, followed by another year of “second mourning”. The clothes for this were in combinations of black, gray, and mauve. Young girls wore deep black for three months, and second mourning for another six, but they did not wear crepe veils or have their dresses trimmed in crepe.

Men and older boys wore the four-inch black mourning band upon the left sleeve of a dark colored suit, but a widower mourned his loss only four or six months. During that time he must not be seen at a dance or a place of general entertainment, but after that he might go his way.

It was simple economics that the bereaved married again as soon as it was decently proper.

The crepe veils and black-bordered handkerchiefs of the women were easily borrowed, and they were freely loaned. It was the black dresses and petticoats which presented the serious problems, especially if the loved one’s illness had been short, or the death a sudden one.

One Fairbury lady, whose husband was taken critically ill, was told by the doctor that he could not possibly survive. To be a little forehanded, she threw all the clothes of herself and her daughter into the dye pot; and was subsequently much perturbed when her husband made a fine recovery.

CHAPTER VII
The Methodists

What with all the feuding and fighting, general drunkenness and wholesale arson, the churches of Fairbury had their work cut out for them. The preaching was of the eternal damnation brand, and, it must be admitted, there were plenty of concrete bad examples at hand.

A visiting revivalist, hit in the head with a chunk of sod or a rock pitched through an open window, was able to draw an even hotter picture of hell. In winter, church meetings were regularly broken up by red pepper thrown on top of the heating stove, reducing the entire congregation to helpless coughing that drove them home. Or, it might be just plain noise that drowned out all the services. Bean shooters and window pane tappers were commonplace; and so, to be successful, a preacher needed his wits about him.

The churches received powerful help in 1876, when John Scibird, the new editor of the Fairbury Blade, moved to town. Himself a Methodist, he had lived in Bloomington, where he had been a postmaster and member of the city council, and editor of a couple of newspapers, one of them being the Pantagraph. He was a man of high morals, besides having a family of his own, and he went right after some of the graceless young members of his church in print. When the janitor complained that some of the boys, sitting together in the back seats, relieved the tedium of the sermon by spitting tobacco juice into puddles on the floor, Scibird lectured the culprits severely, and threatened to publish their names if it happened again.

His reproofs were frequent and blistering, and they covered a rich field.

For instance, the evening services of all the churches were dating time for the young people. The girls came in decorously with their parents for the preaching, while their swains waited outside. Later, as they emerged from the church and came down the steps, each one's particular admirer would advance and ask permission to walk her home. There were no telephones, of course, and it was a spontaneous after-church arrangement, whereby each boy took a chance on his girl having come that night. To avoid standing around

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Elmer was the oldest of them, and for years they perpetrated most of the mischief around Fairbury. Other boys of the town, as was natural, did a few things, too: but, if there was any doubt at all about who were the culprits, the McDowell boys instantly received credit.

The Methodists forgave them some of their pranks, because of the performances they put on after church when they had removed the wheel taps from their father's buggy. All the horses and buggies were tied at long hitching racks in front of the church, and the rest of the Methodist congregation lingered to watch Isaac's family drive away. One by one his wheels would fall off; and so, dressed in his Sunday best, he would wrestle them back in place. His boys never raised a finger to help him, but they did express the profoundest sympathy, wondering loudly who could have done such a cowardly thing to such a nice old man.

They gave repeat performances of this, undoubtedly by popular request, varying it with the times they hid the taps under the cushions of the back seat so that the wheels kept coming off all the way home.

The boys also exchanged the wheels, front with back, on the Baptist minister's carriage. It caused no damage, but, since the rear wheels were normally the larger, the new angle of the buggy discombobulated the horse and upset the preacher's dignity.

It was these same McDowell boys who were responsible for a circus tent leaving town. They found they did not care for the performance, and, as the tent had been pitched on a vacant lot by the railroad, and a freight train happened to be switching at the time, they tied one of the guy ropes to the end of the caboose. When the train pulled out, the tent went right along with it, leaving behind a mightily surprised audience and troupe of performers beneath the stars.

What happened one conference time, however, was a completely different matter. The Methodist ministers of the surrounding country had met at Fairbury to transact annual church business, and to be assigned to their new pulpits. It was customary for the members of a local church to take one or more of the visiting clergymen to their homes for the night, and so Isaac McDowell, being an Elder, invited a couple of the visitors to go home with him. They had another meeting after supper, and as the men walked back to the

church after dark, the boys slipped up behind them and walloped the visitors with a piece of rubber hose. Their victims knew enough about the town that they made specific accusations, which the Elder denied in horror. For proof, they all rushed back to the house where they found the boys, even at that early hour, sound "asleep" in bed.

That was far from being the end of the matter, because the boys had discovered an interesting new sport. For several nights, they hung around the dark alley of the Arcade Block, busily cracking all heads that came into reach, and there were a fair number of casualties before they were caught and arrested. They were let off with a fine, but Scibird's next paper, which was published weekly, carried the account of the outrage under the headlines: "Rubber Hose, $9.45 a foot."

After ingenious development, their weapon became known as the "stuffed club", and it was widely used in Fairbury on the after-theatre crowds and Saturday night shoppers. The victims were so numerous that when a "club" was finally captured and put on exhibition at the Blade office, it drew crowds eager to inspect it.

It proved to be a canvas sack, six inches in diameter and twelve inches long. It was tightly stuffed with excelsior and coarse salt, and tied to a stick two feet long. As a weapon it had range, weight and flexibility, and quite easily knocked a man unconscious. For years, anyone attending Quarterly Conference in Fairbury learned to be unusually wary.

A few well-placed arrests finally put a stop to the "stuffed club" activities, and in 1890, the exasperated village fathers ended the rest of the trouble with an ordinance providing a twenty-five dollar fine for anyone maliciously disturbing a church service.

The Catholics remained aloof from the other denominations, as their priest preferred. So it happened that one night there was a big dance going on at the new McDowell Hall. The orchestra was good, and a fine time was being had by all, when the priest mounted the stage and announced that he didn't want the girls of his parish dancing with any Protestant boys.

Now the McDowell boys, being Methodists, for which the Presbyterians and Baptists gave constant and devout thanks, took this as a personal insult. Working as a team, and aided by their pals, the brothers selected the Catholic boys, knocked them out, one by

one, and threw them down the long stairs.

The priest and a number of the girls discreetly retired during the Donnybrook, but enough stayed, so that when the pile of bodies at the foot of the stairs had been completed, the orchestra struck up once more, and “joy was unconfined”.

The churches of Fairbury had arrived with the first railroad: St. John’s Catholic Church in 1857, and the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian the following year. Religious tolerance was not even a dream, then, and denominational lines were distinctly drawn.

The Presbyterian pastors were well-educated men who preached with decorum to conservative, educated congregations. They taught the total depravity of mankind, unconditional predestination, and limited atonement for a certain few selected to be saved by Christ.

The Baptists, like the Presbyterians, believed in original sin derived from Adam, and the predestination of one’s every act from the beginning of time. They also believed in the absolute freedom of conscience, and the literal interpretation of the Bible in faith and practice. They allowed no infant baptism, but their adults were baptized by complete immersion.

Their creed resembled the Presbyterian, but their ministers and congregations were like the Methodists. The latter believed passionately that their pastors were men chosen by God to preach the Gospel. Education, beyond the ability to read the Bible was held to be unnecessary, for God gave them the inspiration for their sermons.

Both the Methodists and Baptists believed the individual might be saved through his own efforts, and that it was the minister’s job to bring the sinner to his knees. It took eloquence and moral fervor to do it, and a good set of lungs. They had no loud speaker system, and a voice had to reach the far edges of the crowd. A good orator had to be a real “son of thunder”, and it was Abraham Lincoln who said he “liked to have a minister preach like he was fighting bees”.

Both the Methodist and Baptist Churches were the products of the frontier. Every day of their lives, the pioneers had to make instant, vital, and final decisions alone, and later, perhaps, to defend them with their fists. It made for a self-assertive people of robust individualism, and since the struggle for mere physical survival produces moral callousness, the preachers had to drive hard to

break it down.

Preachers and church members alike, they were fanatical about their religious differences, and the Methodists and Baptists were the most aggressive about them. They admitted no common ground of understanding. Their's was the only way to salvation, and the other fellow was bound straight for hell.

The Reverend John Darnall was notable for this. He was a Kentuckian who came up to Fairbury with his little Baptist flock, and was the first minister to deliver a sermon there. He also became justice of the peace and a man of some consequence in the neighborhood, but his memory remains green because of one of his sermons. His congregation never forgot the morning he read the Scripture from Acts, slammed shut the big pulpit Bible, and shouted: "But I do not agree with St. Paul!"

It was he who fought down the efforts of the Presbyterian minister to start a Sunday School. He denounced it as a kind of speculation. He also forbade the Moore family to read the Chicago Journal, a newspaper to which they had subscribed, because its political views differed from his own. So great was his influence, that all the copies remained in the post office, undelivered and unread.

While the Baptists and Presbyterians had resident pastors, there were some years that the Fairbury Methodist church was served by Circuit Riders, and between the visits of these men, their class leaders conducted the services.

The Methodist Circuit Riders were a hardy breed. They rode the trail on horseback in all kinds of weather, sick or well, ate what was given them, usually a "Methodist dinner"—chicken, of course. Not only did they have the usual drunks and young toughs to cope with, but there also were the competition camp meetings, which sometimes resulted in sneak visits of pillars of a rival church to loosen wheels, push wagons into the river, and stone tents. For all this, the Circuit Rider received the munificent sum of one-hundred and fifty dollars a year, and some of them tried to add a little to it by selling religious books along the way. They were rewarded by the love and reverence of their people.

Much has been said of the fortitude of the Circuit Riders. They endured much, it is true, but their wives also endured much, what with raising their families with so little, and alone.

It was the loneliness which made it so hard, and one young bride decided to accompany her husband on his Circuit. She left a trail of consternation behind her, because a surprise visit from the minister was one thing, since he was grateful for hot food and a warm bed, but a surprise visit from the minister's wife was something quite different. The second time it happened, one of her hostesses took action: she put only her second best quilts on the guest bed. The bride understood the warning, and ceased her unexpected visits forthwith.

Even after they left the Circuit and settled down into parsonages, all Methodist ministers and their families still had much to bear. Not only were they still grievously underpaid, but it was the policy of the church to move them to a new charge every two years. Fairbury had twenty-five ministers in thirty-six years, from 1857 to 1893. Moving around like that could leave a blight upon one's family.

There were other disadvantages, too. Hiett Taylor, a Fairbury mayor, whose father rode an Ohio Circuit, reached manhood with two special things he hated with passion: nankeen* trousers, which he never wore again as long as he lived, and people who patted him on the head, and said: "How are you, my little man?"

People, of course, meant to be kind. They brought food to the minister, although they often stayed and ate it up. Or a couple, who had come from a distance to be married, would be invited for supper and to stay all night; and sometimes the groom forgot to pay.

Then there was the matter of "still good" clothes. These were given to the minister's wife to fix over for herself and her family. One poor soul, upon receiving an especially elaborate bonnet, sadly observed that she had nothing she could wear with it.

Moreover, there were always a few people in the congregation who felt they owned the preacher's family. They felt free to "run in" any time, day or night, and their sharp eyes noted everything and anything amiss.

They were equally free with their criticism, too, of the personal appearance of the pastor's wife, the way she raised her children, managed her household, and cared for her husband. She was

Nankeen was a coarse cloth of a repulsive yellow color. It wore like iron.

expected to participate in all church services and group meetings. Nor was that enough, for she was criticized if she did, and criticized if she didn't, and all the while she must endure the pettiness with Christian forebearance.

The pioneer Methodists were a stern sect. Their women wore only plain clothes and very little jewelry. Card playing, dancing, and strong drink were forbidden as being snares of the devil. Their meeting houses were unadorned; the seating was segregated, with the men on one side of the church and the women on the other. There was no instrumental music for their services, and the congregation knelt for prayers.

All this differed from their fellow Methodists back East, who attended church in family groups; sat at prayer instead of kneeling, and enjoyed the music of an organ and choir. Their revivalism was far more restrained, too, for their English heritage made them traditionally antagonistic to all emotionalism, which they found shocking.

The aim of the frontier revival sermon literally was to scare the listeners into salvation. It was considered insufficient just to be converted; one had to give evidence of being thoroughly converted. The weeping of frightened sinners, the rising exhortations of the minister, the bellowing "hallelujahs" and "amens" of inspired members of the congregation, and the mournful singing, all produced a form of mass hysteria known as "Methodist fits", when members of the congregation were "seized with running, jumping and barking exercises". There was one meeting, though, at the Avoca church, which was the talk of the whole country-side for years and years. On that occasion the entire congregation, and later the minister himself, had come down with the "jerks".

The early Fairbury revivals were held in the woods; lasted for several days; and people drove for miles to attend them. Everyone brought their own food; the men slept under their wagons, and the women in them.

With a new generation, however, the Protracted meetings changed, and no longer had the hysterical emotionalism of the pioneers, but they still were the "Shouting Methodists". These Protracted meetings, as their name indicated, lasted for a week or more, and were usually the combined efforts of several communities. People came from afar, but even the best of the roads

were so bad that, once arrived anywhere, they wanted to stay awhile and enjoy themselves before undertaking the struggle to get back home. Besides, it was usually the only time of year they were able to visit with some of their more distant friends.

Most of the congregation lived in the tents they brought, although some of them still used their covered wagons. The services were held in the tabernacle, which was a roof of brush laid across poles to shelter the people from the sun. Almost every service had ten or more ministers moving among the congregation, to exhort the sinners and plead with the wavering, giving their particular attention to the former converts who had "backslid".

Above it all, the singing, and the shouting, and the prayers, there sounded the joyous laughter of John Bodley.

Bodley had been converted as a young man, but instead of the customary weeping as a penitent, he had been so filled with the joyousness of his Christian experience that he amazed the congregation by bursting into laughter. As he grew older, he became a legend, a living symbol of the joy of religion, and he was known throughout Central Illinois as "Laughing Bodley". He was no exhibitionist, but was deeply sincere, and his laughter, loud and sonorous, was in no way a disturbance. Instead, it denoted a deep satisfaction with various points of the preacher, and with the new conversions. He was so well known and beloved, the Chicago Tribune carried a feature article about him.

At home, in the Fairbury church, it was said that Bodley's public prayers made even the little boys feel that the room was filled with the Presence of God.

One summer, when Fairbury and the surrounding country had suffered a long, severe drought, and the crops and gardens had been damaged extensively, the churches called a union meeting to pray for rain, and John Bodley was asked to give their prayer.

That night, about 11 o'clock, there was a terrific rain storm, and when the people got out of bed the next morning, all Fairbury was awash.

Bodley had business at the Kring greenhouse, and he waded up there. Logan waited on him, and as he tied up the package of plants, he admiringly remarked that it was a mighty fine prayer Mr. Bodley

had made the day before.

Bodley looked out over the lake surrounding them, and gravely replied: “Yes, but I believe I overdone it.”

Nearly all the Revivals were profoundly moving, but there were others which seemed so mechanical that they had exactly the opposite effect from the one intended.

Three young girls, Ollie Filley and a couple of the Dominy sisters, were attending such services. The minister, thinking to put a dramatic clincher to his sermon, asked the congregation to stand. Everybody stood. He expounded further, and then he asked all those who were absolutely certain of going to Heaven to sit down. A few seated themselves. Isaac McDowell was among them. Then, the minister asked that all those who felt that there might be a good chance of their going to Heaven to sit down. Quite a number sat down this time. Whereupon, the minister, thinking to achieve his grand climax, asked that all those who wanted to go to Heaven to sit down.

Ollie, who prided herself on her strong-mindedness, took a look at the back of Isaac’s head, and remembered some of the remarks her father had made about him. She decided that if he was so sure that he was going to Heaven, she wanted no part of it and explained herself thus to her friends.

So it was, that when all the rest of the congregation seated itself, prepared to hear the sermon go on, those three girls, well down towards the front, were left standing, unregenerated souls who had no desire to go to Heaven.

To the horror and shame of their mothers, Mrs. Stafford, one of the church members, crossed in front of the congregation, kneeled down before the girls, and prayed aloud for their salvation.

Probably they enjoyed their conspicuousness; at any rate, they didn’t get converted and join the church then, although they always attended services regularly, and grew up to be very respectable married women with families.

Possibly, this status never would have been corrected, but many years later a favorite granddaughter of the strong-minded one came to live with her for a time. Herself a staunch member, she immediately became active in the Fairbury church, and during a

drive for membership, she had occasion to consult the church roll. Astonished not to find her grandmother's name upon it, she questioned the old lady so thoroughly, and to such purpose, that the minister met with them privately in one of their homes, and received the three chums into the fellowship of the Methodist church. It made a fine sensation the next Sunday when he announced it from the pulpit.

In Fairbury, the Methodist Society had been organized in July, 1858, and some of the charter members were from the Avoca church.

Through the efforts and financial help of Dr. Beach, they built a church at once, but by the end of the war it was outgrown, and it had to be replaced by a new one of brick, to resist the village fires which continually bedeviled the town at that time.

It was dedicated in 1876, and in honor of the occasion, one of the church members, Mr. M. R. Stilwell, cut letters from cardboard, which he gilded, and strung into mottoes to bedeck the walls.

Just six months later, a tornado roared across town, blew the parsonage from its foundations, seriously damaging it, ripped off the church roof, and leveled three of the walls. On the remaining wall they found a lone festoon: "In God We Trust."

It was a crushing blow, and Dr. Beach had died, but Ben Walton was a member now. Through his energy, encouragement and generosity, a third church was built on the foundation of the ruined one, while the members held their services in the Fairbury Hall.

This new building, too, was dedicated, but it lacked many things, and the ladies of the church, young and old, set to work with a will to supply them.

"The young ladies of the M.E. Society are to hold a Doll Fair, and a Strawberry and Ice Cream Festival at the Open House. The funds will be given to the tower fund of the M.E. Church."

Some months later: "The Ladies Aid Society of the M.E. Church held a ten cent tea in the church basement Tuesday evening, at which time about 175 ladies and gentlemen were entertained. The penny strips being given out in the interest of securing funds for the pipe organ were returned at this time and a neat sum realized. An elaborate lunch was served."

The ladies won a musical contest hands down, because their song was original, and they sang it from the heart. The tune was a familiar one: “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

“Our Organ”

“We’ve built a fine new building on the corner lot at home.
It’s just the latest kilter, with a gallery and dome.
It seats 800 people--finest church in all the town,
O, we are marching on.

And when ‘twas dedicated, why we planked the thousands down,
That is, we paid some thousands, every fellow did his best,
And the Ladies’ Aid Society - it promised all the rest.
O, we are marching on.

We want an organ in the church -- the finest in the land.
Twill have a hundred pipes or more, its melody will be grand.
And when we sit on oaken pews and hear the masters play,
Then we’ll go marching on.

‘Twill carry us to realms of bliss unnumbered miles away.
Twill cost a cool three-thousand and ‘twill stand the hardest test.
Man, pay two-thousand on it -- Ladies’ Aid the rest.
As we go marching on.

We’ll give a hundred sociables, cantatas, too, and teas.
We’ll bake a thousand angel cakes, and tons of cream we’ll freeze,
We’ll beg and scrape and toil and sweat for several years or more,
And then go marching on.

And then we’ll start all o’er again for a carpet for the floor.
No, it isn’t just like digging the money from your vest,
When the Ladies’ Aid gets busy and says, “We’ll pay the rest.”
While we go marching on.

Of course we are proud of our big church from pulpit up to spire.
It is the darling of our eyes, the crown of our desire,

But when we see the sisters work to win the cash that lacks,
As the church goes marching on.

We somehow feel the church is built on women's tired backs.
And sometimes can't help thinking, when we reach the regions blest,
That the men will get the toil and sweat, and Ladies' Aid the rest,
While we go marching on.

We've done our very best to start the organ fund along.
We've done the very best we can in poetry and song,
We want a mile of pennies -- that there's nothing wrong,
O, won't you help along?

Chorus:

"Glory, Glory, Hallelujah,
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah,
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah,
We are surely it."

Later there came the triumphant notice: "The new church organ placed in the Methodist Church by the society is a real pipe organ, and the finest instrument of its kind ever shipped into the country. It is almost the equal of a regular pipe organ."

Also: "A new platform is being laid in front of the M.E. Church, which will not only improve the appearance of things, but remove a stumbling block from the brethren and sisters."

Since coming to town, the social life of the church had quickened. There were New Englanders in Fairbury, and they made their presence felt. No longer did the men and women sit apart during services, and they had a choir and organ music. They still disapproved of drinking, card playing, and dancing, but their women dressed as the others.

The "Love Feasts" of the early church had changed too. In the beginning they had been testimonial meetings to which only the loyal, faithful members of the church were invited. Bread and water were passed in commemoration of their common brotherhood. After the Love Feast, there had been the preaching, followed by communion. With the passing of time, the feast came to mean a short testimonial meeting after the regular sermon, and it never lasted more than fifteen minutes. They gave their favorite Bible

verses, and made suggestions for the church.

Time had brought other Methodist changes, too. The one-day revival meetings, when they took their dinners and preaching to the woods, were called “Basket Meetings”. These became the annual Sunday School picnics, when the children were loaded on hay racks each summer and taken for a day in the woods. The older members of the congregation followed in their buggies. They took their own dinners, but these were put together on the tablecloths laid upon the grass, and each mother brought more than enough for her own family, so there would be plenty for everyone. They had swings and croquet sets, went wading in the river, and had contests and ball games. There were free lemonade and ice cream, and the Juvenile Band furnished the music.

Nor were the senior members of the congregation neglected. They received special attention each year at the “Old Folks Dinner”, which was held at the church. It was given by the young people, who planned and served it, and they presented the program afterward. Popular at first, the custom soon died out because of the general reluctance to admit to so advanced a required age.

Sunday afternoon, from 2:30 o’clock, was now devoted to the Sunday School. The other churches of the town also had Sunday Schools, and their hours differed. Ollie Filley and the Dominy girls discovered a way to evade the Sunday tedium successfully, for no work was permitted on that day, but neither was any play.

The girls found that, by hurrying a little between the churches, they were able to attend services all day long. They went first to the Baptist, and then to the Methodist, for the regular preaching. At noon they got over to the Presbyterian Sunday school, after which they took time off and went home to dinner. At two-thirty the Methodist Sunday School convened, lasting most of the afternoon, and after supper they went back to church again.

The Methodist Sunday school was their favorite, as it was with the majority of the Fairbury youngsters, for there was nearly always something special going on there.

Years later, Grace Sharp, daughter of Elder David Sharp, who taught school in Fairbury, made the remark that she could invariably distinguish a Methodist child by his poise before the

public, since they were accustomed to audiences from babyhood. These children gave plays, pantomines, recitations, and concerts. They sang solos, duets, trios and quartets. They played the piano, and recited dramatic poems. They engaged in essay and oratorical contests.

What was more, the Sunday school had a fair-sized lending library which, at first, was the only one in town; and the raising of funds to support it was an annual project of the church.

Nor was all the activity confined to the church building. The teen-age group got up plays, all with a high moral quality, and presented them in their homes. The admiring parents were jammed into the parlor; the dining room became the stage, with a sheet over the doorway for the curtain; and the kitchen beyond was the dressing room.

These amateur theatricals grew into a formal literary society, with planned programs and singing. That, in turn, became the Epworth League, which met at the church every Sunday evening before the preaching service, and was the forerunner of the present youth program.

It was this new generation of Methodists who were accomplishing the social changes in the church. The “Carpet Ball Social”, once so popular, was outmoded. For this, each lady had brought a large ball of “carpet rags”, which were made of strips of old cloth sewed together at the ends, and they were used for the weaving of the ever-popular rag rugs and carpets. In the core of her ball the lady put her name, and during the evening the balls were auctioned off to the gentlemen. They then unwound their balls to discover their partners, and “escort them in to a supper of oysters, hot coffee and cake”.

In Fairbury, oysters came in tall cans, and were in great demand at social gatherings, where they were popular both fried and in soup. The latter style involved a slight risk, because occasionally, perhaps at an extremely “recherche” affair, a prankster would slip a rubber oyster into one of the bowls. This proved to be very popular because, after the brief period of experimental chewing, it would be politely discarded on the edge of the plate, from whence it was rescued and used over again.

Promenade Festivals were much more genteel. They required plenty of room, and so they were held in Fairbury Hall with the public invited. At these events the guests promenaded slowly around the sides of the Hall to music, visiting with friends. When they had wearied of that, they repaired to the center of the room where the refreshment tables had been set up. The prettiest of the Methodist girls, wearing their daintiest aprons, served as waitresses, usually offering ice cream and cake to the guests.

For the Pound Sociable, the friends called between the hours of three and ten p.m. and left a package. One such totaled tea, coffee, sugar, rice, meat, butter, beans, dried fruits, canned fruits, crackers, soap, starch, dry goods, and some money. Such donations were used to help an impoverished family, or their own underpaid minister.

"Sociables" were the most popular way to raise money for the church. They were held about once a month, usually in the homes of the church members, and they speedily developed into a polite type of warfare. The attendance became a gauge of a family's social standing, and it was soon necessary to promise something unique to intrigue the interest of the fickle public. "Pie Socials", for instance, had always been popular, but something more was needed.

Mrs. Frances McDowell held an "Avoirdupois Sociable". The John Virgins gave a "Peanut Sociable". The invitations for this were sent out in peanut shells tied together with ribbons.

The Davy Sharps held a "Pink T". There were hammocks under the trees, and the lawn was bright with torch lights. These lights were covered iron cups with wicks which burned whale oil. They were tied to sticks of the desired length, and stuck into the ground for illumination. The meaning of the "Pink T" became evident when the ice cream was served. Each dish had an elaborate pink cardboard letter T inserted into it.

They had a Corn Social at Dominy's, where they ate corn meal mush with milk, corn bread, corned beef, sweet corn, popped corn, corn starch cake and corn starch pudding.

A "Lemon Squeeze" was another assault upon their stomachs. The menu was advertised in the paper, and this time they offered, in the order given herewith:

“Lemonade - Lemon Wafers
Potatoes Hotel de Maitre
Lemon Charlotte Russe - Lemon Jelly
Lemon Caramel Cake - Lemon Pie
Lemon Jelly Cake - Meats
Celery - Pickles - Slaw
Lemon Ice - 10 cents extra
A program will be given.”

The Blade further noted a sociable, although it was given in a neighboring town, which featured Blindfolded Hugging. The men, who were blindfolded, took turns guessing the contours of their feminine partners. The usual mention of food was forgotten in the excitement which arose when some of the men discovered they had been hugging their own wives while guessing someone else!

By 1905, however, this steady procession of sociables to raise money for the church purposes had nearly demoralized the congregation. The women were nervous and exhausted with all the planning, house-cleaning and cooking involved, and the men’s stomachs could endure no more. In September, at a conference of Laity of Central Illinois Methodist Episcopal Conference, resolutions were adopted denouncing church sociables for revenue in favor of “good plain tithing”.

As popular as the sociables were, it was upon their Christmas entertainments, that the Methodists lavished their best efforts. As early as 1878, they urged the parents to use the church tree as a medium to present gifts to their children and friends, assuring them that a competent committee would be in charge. The entertainments became an important annual event, and they worked hard to make each one bigger and better than ever before.

For one Christmas they made a huge elephant. It came from behind a curtain, drawing a handsomely decorated railway passenger car. Santa Claus was astride the top of it and held the lines, while inside the car rode fifteen little girls. They were dressed in white, with blue sashes and gilt crowns, and on the breast of each was a letter to spell out “Merry Christmas”. They sang carols, and then distributed the gifts.

By 1899, the entertainments had progressed to the point where the committee could charge ten cents admission to help defray

expenses. For this occasion, which followed the victory of the Spanish-American War, they announced: “A beautiful battleship will be one of the novel features of the entertainment. It will sail into the audience loaded with luxuries for the little ones.”

They had only one real mishap. The Christmas trees of the period were decorated with strings of popcorn and hung with frosted cookies. They were lighted with little wax candles, and wise property owners always kept a pail of water close at hand to douse the fires. This particular program centered about a snow-covered cabin, and the cotton on the roof caught fire from one of the burning tapers. Prompt action saved the presents, but the audience panicked. In the rush to get outside several windows were broken, but no one was seriously injured.

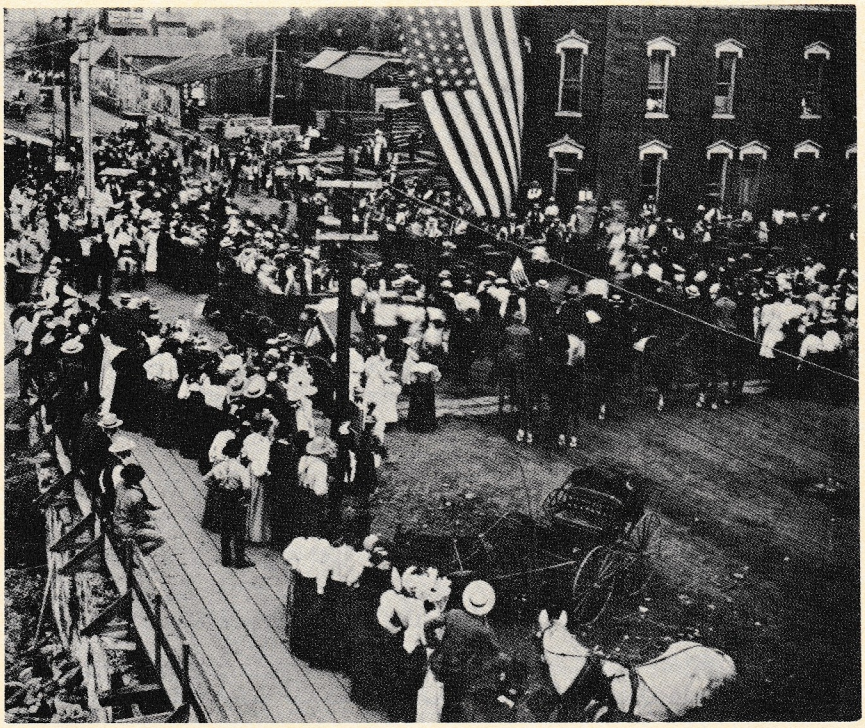
They also had a crisis they never knew about. It happened just before Christmas, and the committee had planned an aeroplane to fly down from the balcony on wires. A cold spell of weather had come on, and the boiler of the church furnace gave out. They sent post haste for Charlie Day, a fellow Methodist and a plumber.

It was impossible to get a new boiler on such short notice, but Charlie had an old-time steam thresherman working for him, who advised him to burn horse manure in the furnace. They did it in threshing machine emergencies, he said, and it was a sure fix. Charlie tried it, and it did work, but the weather dropped to ten below zero on Christmas Eve, and they had to keep on burning manure all during the entertainment. They had to shovel steadily, and the stench in the basement was suffocating. Of course, it drifted upstairs, but the smell of horse manure was a familiar one, and it seemed to go unnoticed in the excitement of the aeroplane. At least no one came down to investigate. No one ever knew of the heroes of the furnace room, and they never told, but the next day or two were a time when it was easy to locate a Methodist by his fragrance.

CHAPTER VIII
The Celebrations

Fourth of July was the major social event of the summer.

Livingston County had sent nearly fifteen hundred men to war, and Fairbury had contributed its full share. They had shed their own blood, and they remembered the dead. Their women and the younger boys had harvested the grain left standing in the fields, and kept things going while they awaited the soldiers' return. So, when these people sang “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”, the very tree tops shook, and the fervor of their patriotism could be measured by the fact that Fourth of July was one of the two days during the year when all the business houses closed.



A Fourth of July crowd on Main Street.

When Abraham Lincoln was killed the town had gone into shock. Homes and business houses were draped with mourning in his honor.

The exceptions were conspicuous, self-proclaimed Democrats and Southern sympathizers. The "Amsbury and Jones" emporium was particularly notable for their flaunting of disrespect. A mob began to gather and so many threats were made that young Jones finally stepped outside and announced to the crowd that anyone attempting reprisals would be shot down. It effectively cooled that situation but it did not stop the talk. A Mr. Bullman is remembered for expressing himself as being glad of it, and that "Lincoln ought to have had his head off long ago."

One of the first things the men of the Grand Army of the Republic did upon their return to Fairbury had been to compel the more violent of the Southern sympathizers to leave the country.

These people had been active all during the war, and were members of "The Knights of the Golden Circle", a secret society which supported the right of secession of any state at any time. Out of their membership of three hundred thousand, eighty-five thousand lived in Illinois, and these devoted themselves to sabotaging the Union efforts wherever possible. People called them "Copperheads", because they were considered to be as treacherous as a copperhead snake.

Very little was ever said about the local Underground Railway to help free the slaves, either in the casual talk of the men around town, or in the several county histories published afterwards. That was because their secret activities were truly secret.

The portion of the "railway" which concerned Fairbury operated between Strawn and Odell. The Fairbury station was a little cabin back in the woods on the river near the Fugate farm, and one Negro was known to be buried there on the river bank. Nothing is known of the activities. The men went out at night and came back at night.

One tale about them in the histories concerned Doc Ostrander. Probably the slave was sick, and he had been called to attend him. At any rate, Doc found the man in fetters in a loft over one of the stores in Fairbury, waiting for his owners to come and take him away.

Doc drove the five miles to his home in Avoca for the tools to cut the chains. Then, with his own horse and buggy, he drove him to Chicago and saw him safe in the hands of the Abolitionist leader. Furthermore, out of his own pocket, he paid the fugitive's boat fare to Canada.

There were a number of the Copperheads living south of Fairbury, who did not cease their activities with the end of the war, as Richard Crouch discovered. He, himself, was an Abolitionist, and in some way he incurred their displeasure. They decided to have a meeting at their school house to plan what they were going to do about it.

Crouch found out about it and waited until dark. Then before the men began to gather, he crawled in under the puncheon floor of the school house. The cracks in it were wide enough for a good view, and he could hear everything that was being said as they arranged to tar and feather him and ride him out of the community on a rail.

He let them go home undisturbed that night, but the next morning he hunted them up individually, and decisively thrashed them one by one. They never dared touch him after that, but they did continue to be a malevolent influence.

Thus, for all the good Americans of Fairbury, the celebration of the Fourth carried an implicit warning. It began at midnight with firecrackers, rockets, torpedoes, small cannon and "anvils". The latter required a blacksmith's anvil, together with "giant powder" from the mines. The powder was poured upon the anvil, a heavy weight put on top, and a fuse run down. The noise of the explosion was terrific.

Around dawn the church bells began ringing, and they continued throughout the day. One year, and one year only, a half dozen little boys rang the fire bell. They were jailed for their efforts, which decisively prevented a repetition.

The crowds began coming to town early in wagons, buggies and trains, and by the middle of the morning everyone was gathered down on Main Street for the parade.

One year the crowd on Main Street was so great that they broke through the board walk. Willing hands propped it up temporarily, and the parade went on. It was headed by a Marshal on horseback,

followed by the band, the members of the Grand Army of the Republic, and the Fairbury Fire Department, all in uniform. After them came a line of open carriages with the speaker of the day and other prominent citizens.

One year, 1893, there was a float representing “The Pinta”, which carried Columbus and representatives of different Nations; a wagon with the “Goddess of Liberty”, and little girls, who represented the different states. Another wagon carried a glee club, which rendered some choice selections during the parade along Main Street.

Sometimes, there might also be a Trade Parade, with the bands and Fire Departments of neighboring towns participating. In that case the railroads had to put on special trains to accommodate the added spectators.

The riding horses came next in line, and these were always decorated. White plow horses were in special demand, since they were more dependable when confronted with bands and firecrackers. Also, being white, the color combinations for their decorations could be much more daring. They had to be thoroughly scrubbed with strong soapsuds, usually left from the family wash, on the day before, so that they would be spotless and quite dry for the parade. The girls, as was customary, all rode side saddle and were decorated, too. Ollie Filley never forgot the social triumph of her light blue paper cambric riding habit which almost touched the ground. It was covered with silver stars, and her crown had a similar trim.

Behind the horseback riders, the numerous buggies and wagons drew into place, and all proceeded to one of the choice spots in the woods near town, or, perhaps, to the fairgrounds. Each family took its basket dinner, and refreshments of various sorts were sold on the grounds. Not all of it was pop.

After dinner, there was a program of speeches and music.

The patriotism was forthright. It was the highest honor to be chosen orator of the day; and another man of great prominence was asked to read the Declaration of Independence.

That over, everyone straggled back to Main Street once more, to watch the boys chase a greased pig, run three-legged races, and

climb a greased pole. The action was spirited because there were cash prizes for the winners. Then there was the Marching of the Ancient and Honorable Order of Plug Uglies, or a Calithumpian Parade, with participants who were dressed in comic costumes. Sometimes, as an added attraction, there would be a balloon ascension.

These ascensions fascinated everyone, and they were certain to draw a big crowd. Even the process of inflating the balloon was intriguing, for a pit was dug and a fire was built in it, and then the balloon was held over it until completely filled with hot air.

After a few years, when the crowds had tired of the ascensions of single balloons, they were released in pairs, more being added as the audience grew blase and critical. A couple of neighboring towns, Chatsworth and Cullom, thought to solve this problem by sending up a couple of female balloonists, but one of them fell out at the height of two-hundred feet and sustained serious injuries. The other one found her balloon collapsing and jumped, landing in a tree top, but relatively unhurt.

So, properly mindful of these mishaps, the Fairbury officials once decided to send aloft a pair of goats. These were harnessed to a small carriage containing pigeons and chickens, and the outfit was placed in the gondola of the balloon. It was released, and the goats went soaring away.

There was a time mechanism on the thing, set off by the sand ballast running out in a stream, whereupon the parachute spread beautifully, and the goats descended. The balloon landed in one field, and the goats in another. The men who captured them reported that they made the descent without twitching a whisker.

When night came, fireworks were sent up from the roof of the engine house. One year the merchants spent two-hundred dollars for the display, an unusually large sum.

The Glorious Fourth ended with a good per cent of the male population in varying stages of drunkenness, and the boys sated, at last, of the din they had created.

The doctors did a land office business coping with all the patriotism, what with stomach aches, poison ivy and powder burns, and it was a lucky mother who could go to bed and sleep that night

without having a couple of sufferers on her hands. The accidents from the fireworks were numerous and serious, and as a young man, Johnny McDowell had his right hand blown off by a giant cracker.

The fireworks could be sold the year around, and the present strict laws regarding the same were formulated by men who nearly blew themselves to bits in their youth, and considered such rights and privileges unnecessary for their own progeny.

Fair week, in August, was homecoming in Fairbury. Married children returned with their families. Best friends were invited to come and spend the week, or longer. The amphitheater at the fairgrounds was filled with eager people happily waving at friends they had not seen in years. The gala atmosphere was irresistible. It lasted a whole week, if you counted the Monday of preparation, and the Saturday of hauling everything away.

The first Livingston County Fair had been held in the Pontiac Court House Square, and Doc Ostrander had served on the Board; but by 1876, the Fairburians were able to catch their breath after all their fires, and they determined to have one of their own. They gave their organization the name of Fairbury Union Agricultural Board, and made John Virgin the first president. The Pontiac paper thereafter referred to it as “the pumpkin show”.

A tract of land in the south part of town was bought for a permanent exhibition grounds, and this was frugally rented out for pasture between fairs. The high school held their track meets there, and for years the employees of the T.P. & W. and their families came out by train from Peoria to hold their annual picnic on the grounds.

In preparation for the fair, as soon as the homes had been turned inside out with the rigors of the annual spring housecleaning, the owners turned their attention to the state of the town.

Trash from the streets and alleys was gathered in wagons and hauled just east of town where it was dumped along the road by the I. P. McDowell bridge. Manure piles from the livery barns were hauled away to fields for spreading. Cowpens, pig sties, and chicken coops were cleaned up. Privies were disinfected and deodorized with lime or copperas. The jail was scrubbed out, and extra police were put on duty.

The fairgrounds were made ready, the buildings repaired, the weeds cut, and the race track dragged. New trees were set out, and a new well dug. This had boards laid about the pump to keep the feet of the thirsty from being muddied from the spilled water.

For years, at fair time, the town was filled with bootblacks, tramps, and bums, and the record of small crimes shot up alarmingly. Every houseowner had to be careful to keep any loose articles in his yard put away, and to have his house and barn tightly locked. Many of the thieves and pickpockets were from Chicago and St. Louis, and these, as well as all questionable strangers, were arrested and held in jail until the fair was over, when they were let loose and "warned out of town". Also, swarms of prostitutes descended upon the place. These were ordered off Main Street during the day, and compelled to leave town at night.

By the end of the week the calaboose was sure to be well crowded, and once they had "nine drunks and two skin gamblers" in court. The improvident were put at labor on the streets to work off their fines.

In the homes as the opening day of the fair drew near, there was much advance cooking and baking. The men of the family always brought home unexpected company then, and it was a time when meals, at best, were hurried in order that the ladies might get back to the fairgrounds early to secure good seats in the grandstand.

The first day of the Fair was spent in preparation. Children lined the fences of the main roads into town, watching the droves of cattle, sheep and hogs come in. The lowing, bleating, and grunting of the excited animals, moving in the clouds of dust thrown up by their hooves, were matched by the cries of their drovers.

The trotting and pacing horses came from the other fairs, their gait leisured, water buckets and blankets swinging beneath their high-wheeled sulkies, and sometimes with a second horse led behind them. The boys sitting on the fences compared them with the local horses which were going to race, and calculated what chances their own favorites would have.

Down at the depot, the freight trains were arriving with the carnival traps. Every dray in town, each pulled by a pair of enormous draft horses, was there to get its share of the business of hauling them down to the fairgrounds. Sometimes there were

arguments, which led to fights among the draymen, about who was to get a certain load.

The fairgrounds itself was the very hub of all the excitement. The carnival owners, a-hustle with the importance of getting things operating in time, hurried the unloading of their properties. Their cries could scarcely be heard above the bawling of the cattle, the crowing of frantic roosters in the nearby poultry barns, and the noise of squawkers everywhere else.

There were the shouts of the tin-type man with his car, who took one's picture for a quarter; the men at the stands for the pink lemonade, the popcorn balls, cotton candy and salt water taffy; the peanut vendor; the cane, whip, gun and balloon men. There were the ventriloquists, the fortunetellers; the men with the usual games of chance; the side shows of snake charmers, the wild man who ate snakes, and the dancers.

One of these dance shows got run out of town. It showed a "wholly exposed female form in dancing posture and multiplied by mirrors". The church ladies found out about it, and took quick action.

Over it all there soared the music of the bands and the merry-go-round. The merry-go-round was a new thing to most of the people, and it was enthusiastically patronized by young and old. Its spirited music was furnished by an organ, which was cranked by a little black boy. The outfit was powered by a steam engine, which was fired by hand, and the thing ran by a cable. Sometimes it carried such a load of passengers the engine could only chug feebly instead of starting properly, and then all the men and boys would pile off to push.

Sam Fendrick and his brother, Fred, owned and operated the merry-go-round at the fair for a number of years, and when business was slack, Sam used to slip in children for free rides. The biggest day's business the brothers ever had was at Cissna Park, where they furnished the entertainment for the Old Settlers Picnic. Sam's merry-go-round ran from nine in the morning until eleven o'clock that night, with capacity loads each trip. Each ride was only a nickel, but the boys took in nearly four-hundred dollars for that one day's work.

Everywhere on the fair grounds people bustled in with things to be exhibited, and the store keepers were setting out their farm machinery and mercantile displays. The rivalry in all of the exhibits was personal and keen, because everybody knew everybody else, and the coveted ribbon was an official seal of approval on a personal accomplishment. The judging of these was solemn and important, and it was conducted on the first day. After it was finished, everybody went to see everything all over again, and find out who had won the prizes.

With Tuesday, the fair began in earnest. The special trains bringing visitors from neighboring towns were crowded, and four hacks from the local livery stables, two of them "quite tony vehicles", plied between the depot and the entrance to the fairgrounds. The walks of all the town were filled with people afoot, and the streets were crowded with carriages and wagons, all bound for the fair. The city sprinkler was working over time now to keep the dust laid along the street to the main entrance.

One of the first days of fair week was always Children's Day, when all children of school age or smaller, were admitted free. After that, everyone had to pay admission, except the workers.

Fred Metz, his wife, and their eighteen children all went in on one family ticket. They lived in the country, where the children were the only pupils in their school, and they carried their lunch in a clothes basket.

There were others who did not fare so well, and one time two penniless, woe-begone little boys so touched the heart of Mrs. Isaac McDowell, that she tucked them under the hoops of her skirt and drove grandly through the entrance gates. Safe inside the grounds, the boys gratefully scampered off to see the sights.

Another special fair day was Old Settler's Day. Anyone who had lived in the county for fifteen years was eligible to belong to the Association, and their reunions were eagerly attended. One year a log cabin was provided for their special comfort.

It is impossible for anyone of another generation to understand the closeness of the bond of affection among the early settlers.

There were so few of them, and the loneliness they had endured together, the homesickness, the bitter day-to-day struggle with raw

nature to make a simple living, created a community of feeling that endured until death.

Together they had put up each other's houses and barns; together they had helped each other in the fields and homes. Together they had celebrated the weddings, assisted at the births, nursed the sick, buried their dead. The reunion of these old friends was something they looked forward to all year long.

The mornings of fair week were given over to contests, such as pulling of heavy loads by draught horses, and the showing and judging of fine livestock on the track in front of the grandstand.

For a time, the sheep were of special interest to the farmers because of the problems of the early flocks. Much of the land was swampy, causing hoof rot, and the owners had lost many of their fine imported flocks.

Friday morning, the last day, was climaxed by the Grand Cavalcade of the Premium Stock.

Any morning was a good time to tour the grounds, see the exhibits all over again, and discuss the prize ribbons. The men gaped at the quilts and water color pictures, and the women wandered among the farm implements, daintily holding up their dresses as they picked their way along the hog pens. Nobody wanted to miss anything.

These barns bordered the grounds on the north, east and west sides, and they resounded to the noises of the animals. Half doors, the lower part chest high, permitted the safe viewing of the stock within. Nearby, in another building, the men had their exhibits of grain, big ears of corn and beautiful polished fruit and vegetables.

The Floral Hall was largely feminine territory. Here the walls were hung with brilliantly colored quilts, crocheted bedspreads and embroidered tablecloths, interspersed with the oil and water color paintings of local artists.

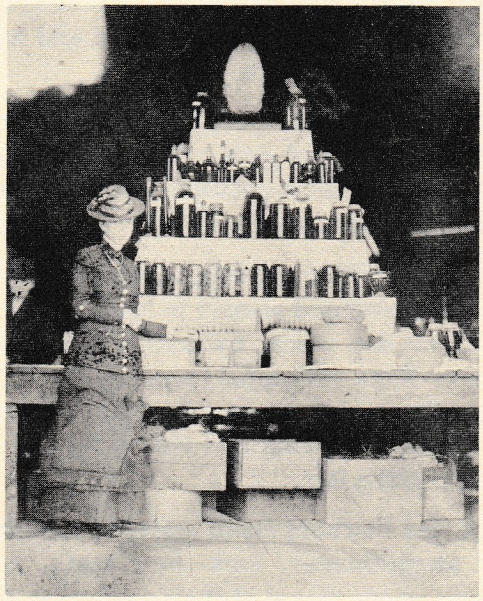
Tastefully arranged on tables beneath them were beautiful articles of knitting, crocheting, tatting and drawn work. There were embroidered pillow tops, table scarves, slippers, and smoking fezes, hand-painted china, burnt wood, and leather.

A little apart from this, the shelves of jams, jellies, preserves,

pickles, chow-chows, and all kinds of canned fruits and vegetables, shimmered in rows like jewels.

Over still further, other tables displayed the fragrant browned loaves of bread, biscuits, and cinnamon rolls, the towering cakes luscious with frosting, and, surely, all the cookies in the world were there. Grown men, as well as the boys, went limp with longing at the sight.

It is true a blue ribbon for any of these things carried a cash prize, but it was valued most of all for the status it gave. The winner was queen of them all, and her husband and family rejoiced accordingly.



Ella Beach judging an exhibit at the fair.

Furthermore, it was the pleasant custom to present one's friends with the food from the exhibits. The editor of the Dwight Star and Herald enviously wrote:

"Don't Give It Away"

"We notice by the Fairbury Blade that the sanctum of the editor of that paper was filled up with all manner of good things last week after the fair. If that is the way it operates, you can safely bet your

boots that we are in favor of a fair next year, sure."

The Blade performed its civic duty by publishing a daily edition during fair week. It gave the program of events for the next day, the results of the horse races, detailed the entries in the various exhibits, and told who got the blue and red prize ribbons. Out-of-town visitors were noted, and perhaps interviewed. In short, the editor kept an eye on everything, and everyone felt pleased and relieved when he announced that the fair was "a hummer".

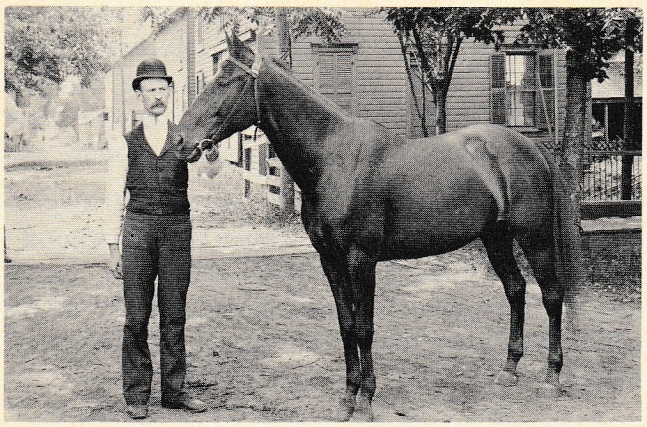
At the noon hour, after all the exhibits had been inspected, the crowd divided into families, or groups of friends, to eat. Many of the out-of-town people brought picnic lunches with them to eat under the trees there on the grounds, but after the dining hall was built, it became the more popular. The Presbyterian and Methodist ladies took turns serving the meals there.

A little before one o'clock, people began moving towards the amphitheatre, the women and girls to find good seats within it, and the men and boys to take their position along the fence by the race track down near the horse barns.

Wagons and buggies filled the infield, and when there were good crowds, the wagons extended almost to Main Street. Indeed, there was one special fair day when, by actual count, there were two-hundred and thirty-three additional teams tied to the hitching posts along that street. There were no people about, however, because all the stores and business houses had closed for the afternoon, and everyone had gone to the fair.

At one o'clock, the Fairbury Band marched into their stand down in front of the amphitheater, took their seats, and tested their instruments. Then, at the signal of their conductor, they opened the afternoon performance.

There were acrobats, magicians, and other variety acts, but it was the horses the crowd really came to see. Many of the entries were local horses, and the rivalry between their owners was violent. Not only was their personal judgment of horseflesh at stake, but their money backed it. The races, as they were run off, were a life and death matter. The anxiety was shared by relatives and friends in the grandstand, and infected the rest of the spectators. Each false start was agony, and the judge's bell in his stand across the track was like the clap of doom.



Bert Haines holding "Maude Adams." Note the fairground barns in the background.

Each group of racers were led in state down the track to the post by the grand marshal mounted on a magnificent horse, and wearing the official red cummerband.

For one year, the fair officials secured Frank James, brother of the famous Jesse James, as starter for the horse races. He had only recently been released from prison after serving his sentence for bank robbery, and tremendous crowds came to see him.

The races were the two best heats in three, the prizes were substantial, and the track was steadily improved until it became known as the fastest half-mile track in the state.

After each race had been run off, everyone relaxed while the track was dragged, and the city sprinkler went around to lay the dust again while the band played.

To give variety to the program, there were hurdle and chariot races, bronco busting and exhibition riding.

Another main event of the early fairs was the parade drill of the Zouave Cadets. The Zouave Cadets were popular all over the country just after the Civil War. Tom Sawyer was one, briefly.

There were no privates in this army. The boys, who ranged from ten to fourteen years old, were all lieutenants, sergeants or corporals; and the toy guns they carried were ones that they made themselves, tin barrels or pine stocks, under the direction of Major Joe Scibird, son of the editor. Their uniforms of red pants, blue

shirt, red caps with blue tops, white shoes and stockings, were so colorful, and their captain's training so effective, they were the pride of Fairbury's heart. Not only were the troops from the neighboring towns invited to compete, but the Fair officials announced that they welcomed "the competition of the world".

Friday, for the children, was a very special fair day, and it was eagerly anticipated by those who had been strong minded enough to retain some of their spending money. Being the last day, it was bargain day, and they could get two bags of peanuts for a nickel. No Fairbury child considered the week a success unless he was actively sick afterwards.

By late afternoon the races, variety acts, music, and speeches were finished. The ground emptied, and the gates were locked for the night. The streets of the town were again jammed with wagons and carriages, every one of them loaded to capacity, and with footsore pedestrians on their way home to a late supper.

After a few years, they continued the entertainment at night. There was a dance pavilion, and fireworks with a set piece for the finale. They also featured a society horse show, which grew to be quite noted.

Saturday was the end of it all, until another year. The canned goods, the afghans and the chickens were stowed into the wagons, and the cows, sheep and horses were headed for home.

The merry-go-round and the refreshment stands came down. The carnival outfits were loaded into drays, and taken back to the railroad station.

"Fairbury Fair is over. The political days were a success and the speaker's addresses interested the audience. It is thought that the finances will come out all right."

Scarcely was the Fair done with, than Hallowe'en beset the citizens, and most of the day following was spent hunting down their scrambled property scattered around town.

Certain things were automatically expected; tick-tacking, the wandering front gate, the overturned privy, the decayed vegetables and dead cats scattered on front porches, and the missing sections of board walks and fences.

Occasionally there was something a little more spectacular to engage their attention, such as a farm wagon on the school house roof. It took real work for the boys to get that wagon apart, hoist it piece by piece, and reassemble it up there against the stars; and it needed much more work later, and at a price, to get it all down again. To the maddened owner it was anything but a joke.

It was serious enough for editorial comment, in 1888:
"Halloween, the day the boys celebrate, is billed to arrive in Fairbury next Wednesday. It will be best to deposit your front gates in the cellar if you want to save time and trouble the following morning; also take the chain off the dog and lock it around your buggy wheels - the chain, not the dog - and for your neighbor's sakes put your turnips and cabbages where the small boys can't get at them. Be wise and prepare against the evil day."

In 1893, however, there was a younger editor, it seems: "To the small boy it is a pleasure to see the head of the house go out in the grey dawn of the following morn and discover his coal house and other property in some neighbor's yard several blocks away. To the grown up person, the custom is a vicious one, but is was inaugurated by our forefathers, and, in respect to their memory, we say, Let 'er go!"

CHAPTER IX
The Scholars

It was the public school which was the true melting pot of the town, although at first it was more like a witch's cauldron. Sprains, bruises and torn clothes were common at recess, and the newspaper reported the bones broken on the playground. Youngsters threw stones at each other on their way home from school, and every boy alive had to know how to defend himself with his fists.

As early as 1881, the Blade demanded to know: "Whether those youths and misses who frequent the fairgrounds at eleven o'clock at night have any parents?"

And this one: "Running and squealing and tusseling with young men on the street is very unladylike and improper by night or day. There is an unpleasant amount of such conduct to be seen on the Fairbury streets almost any evening, and, in many cases by young people who pride themselves on their reputation and social standing."

And again this one: "Boys of this town are hitting girls riding in buggies across the shoulders with whips. The miscreants should be punished."

Newcomers were understandably reluctant to submit their own gently reared children to such conditions. Several private schools were started which were taught by women, and one of the ministers tutored in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and German.

The largest and most successful of these schools operated under the auspices of the German Apostolic Church, but it was open to the other children of the community, and German continued to be taught in the Fairbury High School until World War I.

It was simple economic pressure which forced the little private schools to close. Even the German one disbanded.

The husbands, struggling to make a living, and daily facing ruin from arson and feuding, were becoming increasingly concerned about peaceful ways of doing business. They were discovering for themselves that it made better public relations if their own children attended the school with the rest of the juvenile population. They were having to pay taxes for it, anyway, and they felt they should be

getting their money's worth.

As to the Fairbury school itself, the village fathers had been conscientious in their duty, and during the first year in the settlement, they had established one in a spare building. A couple of years later, to meet the needs of the growing population, they erected a two-story frame school house. There were inside shutters, and the playground, heavily shaded by willow trees, had a picket fence around it, and a flag pole in the center.

Smith Olney was a teacher for years, and Oscar Avery was the principal.

Later, after the Civil War, many of the teachers in Illinois were war widows. The pension they received from the government was only ten dollars a month, and they needed the jobs to keep from starving. Their lot, and that of the men, was anything but a happy one, for they were ever at the mercy of their school boards.

Men teachers were hired for their ability to handle some of the larger boys, as well as for their knowledge of the multiplication table, and their authority was established at once. What was more, it was solidly backed by public opinion, the Blade, and by the parents themselves. The youngster who got a whipping at school, knew for a certainty that another one would be waiting for him at home.

When Editor Scibird came to town, he kept a paternal eye upon the scholars, publishing the rules and regulations, and threatening to make known to the public the ones who persisted in being tardy or played hookey. He also promised to publish the names of the boys who skipped school to play marbles all day long at the depot; but he did approve the humanity of the teachers when they dismissed school for a circus parade. Afterwards, Scibird gave the pupils a verbal pat on the head for having been good children.

Another time the Blade said: "At the Circus Tuesday, about twenty of the Fairbury boys were called out of the crowd and ran a race around the circle, the winning boy to have a free ticket to the evening entertainment. The way the kids lit out and humped themselves was one of the best features of the show. George Parsons was the winner."

That was one sure sign that civilization had set in. Formerly, the

boys had taken particular pleasure in breaking up the performances, and coming to Fairbury meant plenty of trouble for any outfit.

The next time, the teachers had the parade come past the school house, so there would be less time lost, but some years later, when the Thomas house burned, they dismissed school altogether, because the teachers themselves wanted to go to the fire.

The Thomas house, originally known as the "Fairbury House, the Poorest Hotel in Illinois", had been sold, then completely refurbished and rechristened.

The fire had broken out in the kitchen in the early afternoon, and a traveling salesman who was eating his dinner, calmly finished his meal, and left just as the Fire Department arrived. The place burned to the ground.

The fire that destroyed the twenty-year-old schoolhouse itself, however, was pure arson.

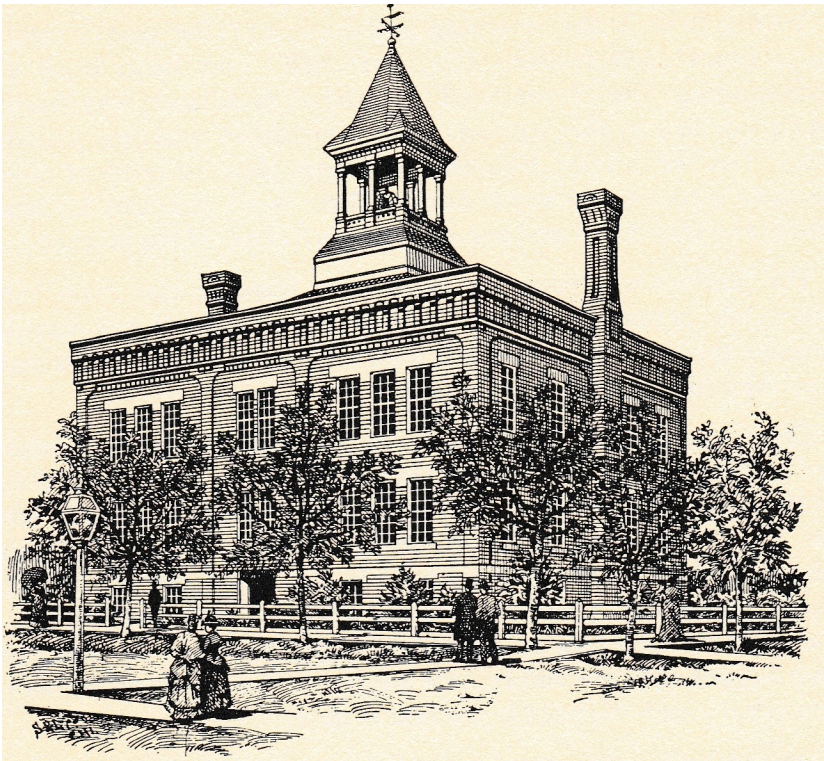
One night in June, some boys, perhaps to celebrate the beginning of vacation, ran a burning load of hay against the building, set it afire, and totally destroyed it; but whatever had been their plans about doing away with the school house, they were disappointed, because the school board immediately rented McDowell Hall. By fall, with a little remodeling and the installation of new seats, they were ready to proceed with the education of the young.

Work on the new building, "a fine brick one", was begun at once and it was soon ready. It was built for thirteen thousand dollars, and had room for four hundred scholars. So great was the general interest of the public in the decorating of the interior, that the janitor, William Karnes, published a request for people to postpone their visits until after working hours, as the rush was so great he was unable to clean up after the paper-hangers.

The high school, together with a few of the lower grades, was housed in the "north side school", which was a frame building with outside shutters and board walks.

Toilet facilities were separate privies; one on the boy's side of the playground, and the other on the girl's. Board fences in front of the doors gave some privacy, but inside there was none. A many-holed seat stretched the length of the building along one side. That was all; but it was kept clean.

Drinking water was brought in by the pail from the well outside, and the dipper was shared by all. The boys attending the buckets were appointed, in rotation, by the teacher.



South side school; built, 1881; razed, 1965.

The older boys, also appointed, took turns tending the fires. Like all other public buildings, the schools were heated with stoves, and the pupils sitting nearest to them slowly roasted, while those along the outer edges of the room were frostbitten. Some of the boys were artists with a stove fire, and at times, when the atmosphere was heavy and the wind just right, it was possible for them to lay one so that the smoke was forced back down the chimney into the room, and then the jubilant scholars would have to be dismissed for the day.

Five days a week, all activities of the scholars were regulated by the sound of the school bell. In fact, it was the various bells of the town which underscored the meaning of life. On Sunday morning, it was the peaceful pealing of all the church bells, summoning the worshipers to the services. There was also the menacing alarm of

the fire bell; the busy clanging of the bells on the railway engines; the bells of the milkman and the peddlers; but the sound which ruled the households throughout the week was the school bell.

It rang twice a day, morning and noon, and the janitor rang it three times each session. The “first bell” was long, brisk and commanding. The “second bell”, some half hour later, was shorter, and a warning to the laggards. Then, in fifteen minutes, sounded the “third bell”, a few taps only, but signifying the crack of doom, because school was ready to begin. There were penalties for being tardy, and they depended upon the inventiveness of the teacher.

The janitors who rang the bells were humane men who knew every child in town. Some are lovingly remembered to this very day because they held that final bell until a breathless child could make it up the stairs and fall into his seat.

There was just one hour at noon to go home to dinner. Teachers and pupils, everybody walked. There was a good hot meal waiting on the table, but there was not one minute to dally, especially after the “Quarter Holiday” went into effect. At the end of each month, the room where no one had been tardy was dismissed at afternoon recess, and it was a privilege coveted by teachers and pupils alike. It placed every man jack on his honor to get to school on time, and what happened to the unfortunate laggard at the hands of his peers, generated plenty of speed in the rest of them.

Scholastically, the school was divided into the Primary, Intermediate, Junior and Senior grades.

Every grade began each morning with a prayer, then a song. Studies were basic, and they were literally whipped into them. There was no nonsense, either about the teachers or the schoolbooks.

Beautiful handwriting was regarded as a form of art. It was practiced as such, and the signatures in the old autograph albums are masterpieces of graceful and shaded flourishes.

Good spelling was held to be another accomplishment, and in the Friday afternoon “spell downs” the competition was spirited. There were additional programs on these afternoons, and the pupils appeared in rotation to deliver orations, recitations, dialogues, and songs.

Geography, since it dealt with the world outside, was a little vague to the children, but even in their old age they never forgot the rollicking song which taught them the capital cities of the world:

"Rus-us-shah, Saint Petersbur-urg,
Saint Petersbur-urg, Saint Petersbur-ur-urg;
Rus-us-shah, Saint Petersbur-urg,
ON the Gulf of FIN-LAND."

The older boys invariably tried out a school master, whose position depended as much upon his strength as upon his learning. He kept a bundle of switches in the corner ready for instant use, and a pupil who misbehaved was yanked up in front of the room and thrashed in full sight of the rest of the pupils, this serving the double purpose of a punishment to the one, and a warning to the rest. It was a point of honor among the boys not to cry out, even under the severest of floggings.

A minor form of punishment was to make a boy go sit with a girl, for their school desks were double ones, with ink wells and lids that raised to reach the space for books, and each desk had a bench seat for two.

Schoolgirls wore pinafores over their dresses to help keep them clean for another day. Beside the playground dirt at recess, there was much chalk dust. Not only was there the normal amount inherent in work at the blackboard, but it was an honor, when the school day was over, to have been appointed to beat out the erasers by hitting them together, and making the dust fly.

Beneath her dress the school girl wore a ferris waist, which was a sort of sleeveless jacket of white cotton material. It buttoned down the front to close it, and there was a button at the middle front and on each side to fasten the panties. These were of white muslin, with a drop seat, and they had embroidery ruffles on the legs, which came just above the knees.

Also, on each side of the ferris waist, there was a metal tab where the safety pins of the elastic supporters were fastened to hold up their long, black cotton stockings. Their shoes were black, too, and were built for hard wear. They were buttoned well above the ankle with a special button hook the clerk at the store gave with every new pair.

They wore only a single petticoat, in contrast with the numerous

ones of the German girls. These children were attending the public school, but they clung to their own style of garments. The boys were dressed like their fathers in long pants and jackets; and the girls like their mothers, in tight waists and very full skirts, with several petticoats beneath them. The skirts had big pockets in them which were the envy of the other girls, for they were such wonderful storage places.

Life, as far as clothing went, was much more complicated for the all American boy. His clothing was regulated by his age. As a toddler, he wore dresses with full skirts and tight jackets.

At six years, when he started to school, he graduated into knickerbocker pants, with a belted jacket, and long, ribbed, dark brown or black cotton stockings, which were held by elastic garters at the knee. Some boys wore leather stockings, but these were not common.

("When traveling with young children, take along some black court plaster for emergency repairs of holes in the knees of their stockings.")

His shoes were ankle high, of stiff cowhide; and copper-toed ones with red tops were popular.

The boy's change into long pants came when he was fifteen or sixteen years old, and it had nothing to do with height. A man of that era wouldn't have been caught dead in a pair of Bermuda shorts, and so a six-foot boy in short pants could easily develop a set of complexes which lasted the rest of his life. Even the attainment of long pants was not always the bliss he anticipated, because a good many boys were expected to wear their father's pants cut down.

School recess was half an hour outdoors, the boys on one side of the building, and the girls on the other, but there was no playground equipment. Instead, little groups chose which games to play: Blind Man's Bluff, London Bridge, Ring Around the Rosy, Run, Sheep, Run, Cat and Mouse, Skin the Cat, Farmer in the Dell, or Three Deep. They played ball or jacks, threw bean bags, skipped rope, or rolled a hoop.

A favorite joke to play on a newcomer required a little circle of children. The first child announced: "I saw an old dead horse." The second child continued: "I one it"

Another said: “I two it.”
Then: “I three it.”
“I four it.”
“I five it.”
“I six it.”
“I seven it.”
“I eight it.”

Wild, derisive laughter from all.

Recess was also a time of sharing, which was another civilizing influence. Bags of candy were passed around among best friends. A nickel, then, actually bought enough candy to make a child sick. Especially popular were the striped sticks of penny candy with the rings. These had colored stones in them, and they were worn in school afterwards.

A group of first graders at the new South Side school.

It was all quite different from the refreshments of the old Avoca school. There the children used to slip out of the school yard into the woods surrounding it, and cut a piece of “slippery ellum” to chew.

This was not always easy to find, however, and so they made gum from the rosin weed which was much more plentiful. It was bitter, but not too distasteful. The stalks of the plant were broken, and then in a few days, after the sap had gathered and hardened, it could be picked and chewed; or a handful of wheat could be held in the mouth and chewed until it became pliable and gummy. This was much more pleasant. Tar was also popular.

Those little pioneer girls had rag dolls filled with sawdust or bran to play with, or ones made from corn cobs. The latter were dressed with bits of cloth, with a string tied around their middle for a waist, and corn silk was used to make the hair.

After school was over, congenial children got together to play. The lawns were wide, and there were plenty of vacant lots near at hand, and they had to get along with each other, or else be lonely.

They made their own amusements and they took the time to enjoy each one of them. Pleasures were simple, and for that reason they were savored all the more. Many of their toys they improvised themselves, using their ingenuity and the materials they had at hand. What was more, the things were made to last.

The boys were usually off playing somewhere, or else they were hatching some sort of mischief. Little girls, however, were required to go straight home from school unless they had obtained previous permission to visit a friend.

They liked to play house together in a corner of the yard, making mud pies and serving them on bits of pretty broken china. Rag dolls were popular and shared the play, but “store dolls” were kept for special occasions.

Even more loved than the dolls, were the picture books that were made for them. Pictures printed in color were unimagined dreams, and the only ones they had were the black and white woodcuts of the magazines. These were carefully colored, cut out, and pasted in cambric scrap books to be poured over again and again.

Relatively few of the children who finished the eighth grade were allowed to go on into high school, because, for most parents, an adequate education consisted of reading, writing, and arithmetic. All else was frivolity. The classes were composed almost entirely of girls, and by 1888 only six boys had graduated. This was because they generally preferred a business education to a classical one.

Nevertheless, the number of high school pupils grew steadily, and by 1899, they were able to organize their first football team. Their first game was with Watseka, and they got clobbered, 6-0.

They had a high school track team, too, and Field Day was held at the fairground, with the schools from the surrounding towns in competition. Admission for adults was 15 cents, children 5 cents,

the money going for the prizes, and the medals were on display at Mundt's Jewelry Store.

Graduation from high school represented the peak of a young person's career, particularly in the case of a girl, because on that night, for the very first time, she was allowed to "turn her hair up" and wear it on top of her head. With that single act she became a young lady.

The graduation exercises were held at the Opera House, and the stage was elaborately decorated with flowers and potted plants. There was music, usually by the Fairbury Band, and the more prominent members of the class delivered essays and orations. "America Iconoclastic", and "Neath the Tyrant's Yoke the People Languish", are two samples. After the exercises had been completed, the friends of the young lady graduates vied with each other to see who could present them with the most bouquets of home-grown flowers, while the girls were still on the stage. It was a custom that necessitated little "flower girls", attired in elaborately decorated dresses, to manage the overflow.

When the class of 1896 graduated, there were eighteen members. The commencement exercises were still held in the Opera House, and for the program each graduate delivered an original speech. They did so well by themselves that it was necessary to continue the exercises on a second evening.

By 1889, there were enough graduates that they got together and organized an Alumni Association, and held a reception. That the receptions were now always governed strictly by decorum was evidenced, presently, by an official "Yell":

"Grip Grow
Grip Grow
Grip Grow
Grow!

Yip you
Yip you
Yip you
Y-O-W-L."

"The yell was given with an energy and effectiveness that was a revelation."

If only a small percentage of the Fairbury children were permitted to attend high school, it was a very much smaller number who managed to enter college. A college education was still only for the privileged few, and most of the lucky ones went to nearby seminaries. The train connections were so bad, however, that those attending school in Bloomington, only forty miles away, were able to get home only twice during the year, at Christmas, and the summer vacation.

Illinois Wesleyan Female College charged one-hundred and seventy-two dollars for tuition and board. As some of the country girls paid it in eggs and meat, the more affluent town girls treated them with disdain.

None of the Wesleyan girls were allowed to attend the theatre or go on picnics, but they were permitted the delights of sleigh rides. They could not ride around at random, but always went to some country home for an oyster supper. Invitations to local homes were also permitted, and that was how Emma Bartlett met General Gridley.

The General, celebrated as Bloomington's first millionaire, was the owner of the local gas works. He was also a "land baron", and had laid out a number of neighboring towns, among them Leroy, Lexington, and Gridley, the latter which he had named for himself. The Gridley home, always referred to, respectfully, as a mansion, was in keeping with the General's financial status; and so, when some of the Wesleyan girls were invited by his daughters to a house-party, they were properly elated.

The young ladies were impressed with the Victorian elegance of the house, but they were perturbed when they presently became aware that the General was following them about, and immediately when they had quit a room, he blew out the kerosene lights. The next morning, when breakfast was called, he raced down the stairway, snatched the morning newspaper from the doorstep, and sat upon it throughout the meal to make sure that no one else would get hold of it before he could read it.

The girls had already heard the gossip, as to how the General had loudly and publicly boasted that the hereafter had no terrors for him, since his wife had made his life on earth one continual hell, and

how he had maintained his independence of her by chewing tobacco in bed and spitting out the window; but he made the guests distinctly uneasy, wondering just what he would do next.

If the girls were nervous, the wife and daughters were even more so; and, as the day wore on, they became more and more distrait, for a party was scheduled for the evening, and he was becoming completely unpredictable.

Gridley was in the habit of retiring early, and so, to the great relief of everyone, he went off to bed, and their apprehensions vanished. It was a light-hearted group who welcomed the remainder of the guests. Their chatter rose as the music and the dancing began, and the party was on.

Suddenly, into the midst of all the festivity, there stamped a rumpled-haired, bare-footed, bare-legged specter attired in a brief nightshirt. With his voice pitched to a battle yell which paralyzed the merrymakers, he demanded to know what in blazes they meant by locking him in his room; and added, with a trace of plaintiveness, that he had hurt his legs descending by the drain pipe. Then he sternly ordered all the young men out of his house, and the girls to go along to bed.

There are, today, people in Fairbury who respect General Gridley's memory, rather less in admiration of the million dollars and various properties he accumulated, than for the old gentleman's ability to slide down a rain spout.

CHAPTER X
The Young Miss and Mister

Whatever else a girl's home might have, there were always a parlor and a porch, and in summer there was a hammock out in the shadows of the yard where she could entertain her friends.

Her parents, mindful of their duty to get her married, saw to it that she had privacy, but equally careful of her reputation, they let the young man know they were always close by, as a general damper on any ideas that he might get.

Since there were no mechanical aids, such as radios or television, for the entertainment of callers, it largely depended upon the young lady herself to improvise the fun for the evening. Therefore, every girl was compelled by her mother to learn to play the organ or piano, no matter how repugnant it was, both to herself and others; and it added greatly to her popularity if she also was able to perform upon a mandolin or a guitar, for all the boys sang, unless they positively had no voice.

The ordinary date was for a Sunday afternoon walk, or a buggy ride. The latter was at the cost of a degree of preparation, because the horse had to be curried, the buggy washed, and the harness cleaned. Consequently, just sitting at the girl's home was very popular with the boys. Nevertheless, even a simple call was filled with danger for any out-of-town man, because of the McDowell boys and their friends who managed to eliminate practically all outside competition. They were particularly hard on the Pontiac boys, who, unlike themselves, had the reputation of being quite fancy dressers, because they wore light plug hats and stylish suits when they came to Fairbury.

The first time the stranger appeared, he was let off with a warning, since it was considered that ignorance was the cause of the mistake; but if he came again, they waited until he had reached his destination, and there in plain sight, while he paused at the gate to wipe the dust off his shoes with his pocket handkerchief, they fell upon him with rotten eggs. One dose of this was usually sufficient to keep him clear of the town, but if his bravery exceeded his discretion, and he came the third time, he got the stuffed club

treatment, which was sure to be conclusive.

It behooved the home-town boy, however, to be wary when he was alone with his girl, because there were at least two fads going of the “ever thine” variety: the lock of hair in the breast pin, and the quilt of necktie pieces. Legitimately, these were bestowed as treasured keepsakes, in return, perhaps, for a handpainted necktie executed by the girl herself; but fads are fads, and these came to be a measure of popularity, and no Apache warrior was ever prouder of his collection of scalps than the girls with their hunks of hair and growing crazy quilts. Many a boy got home from a date to find himself with an unsuspected bald spot, or a cherished part of his wardrobe missing.

Even the sick were in jeopardy. Ollie Filley and the Dominy girls called to offer sympathy to Al Sutton, who was temporarily bedridden, and managed, while unobserved, to snip off the ends of every one of the ties on his rack to add more pieces to their quilts.

There were no telephones, and not having one to make their dates, the men and girls had to write notes to each other, a pocket money bonanza for the small boys who acted as messengers.

Properly done, it was according to the pattern of custom:

“A. C. Jones compliments to Miss Jennie Smith and would be happy to have her company in a ride this evening at 6 o’clock.
Tuesday, July 17th”

“Miss Jennie Smith compliments to Mr. Jones, and would be pleased to accept of his kind invitation, but she has company.
Tuesday, July 17th”

The note method was commonly used by their elders as well:

“Thomas N. Brown and Lady solicit the pleasure of your company on Friday Eve, 23 inst.
January 20”

The notepaper and envelopes they used were small, and beautifully embossed in the daintiest of lace designs around the edges; and their writing was as beautiful as engraving.

It was a time of sentiment and sentimentality, and proper courtship was a serious business to be conducted with a book of etiquette held in one hand, so to speak. It was considered that however rough or uncouth their everyday lives might be, love suffused their souls with an inner light which enobled their characters.

To prove it, they delivered speeches in conversation that were calculated to impress. They wrote poems and formal love letters to the objects of their devotion. In the case of the poetry, the metre was sometimes dreadful, and was achieved by means of a repetitious use of words to fill out a line, but just the same, the boy who could compose an original verse for a girl's autograph album was several jumps ahead of any of his rivals.

There were no drugstore racks of greeting cards to help a young man with his courtship. If he loved the girl, it was up to him to tell her so himself. His home-made poetry and valentines were effective, and so proved by the fact that they were treasured.

The year before they were married, William Stackpole and Jennie Harlow exchanged valentines:

"Valentine
To Jenny

"The long expected day has come,
The day of valentines;
Let me improve it, while it lasts,
To write a few fair lines.

I often think of Jennie dear,
And love to call to mind,
Her charming looks, and beauteous form
And disposition kind.

Let me indulge the hope, that she
May find, this very year,
A nice young man to suit her taste,
And be her lover dear.

May he Miss Jennie Harlow choose
And take her for his wife,
And love her so, o dear, how well,

Better than his own life.
February 14, 1855”

“To Mr. W. T. Stackpole

“From the wreck of the past, which hath perished
Thus much, I at least may recall
It hath taught me that what I most cherished
Deserved to be dearest of all.

Hope like a fountain, in the desert is springing
In the wide waste there still is a tree
And a bird in the solitude singing
Which speaks to my spirit of thee.

The love which my spirit hath painted
It never hath found
But in thee.
St. Valentine
Feb. 1855”

Any kind of letter writing was never undertaken lightly. It was no hasty thing to be dashed off in a moment. A letter was meant to be shared with others, and saved; read, re-read, and cherished. Often, in the dreadful homesickness so many of the settlers endured, it was the one lifeline to the dear ones back home.

Aside from the news, sentiment and reassurance it carried, a letter was important because it was expensive. The postage was high, and letter paper was costly. Since it was necessary to write as much as they could in as little space as possible, most of the handwriting was very small and perfectly formed. Paragraphing was dispensed with, as it took up valuable space, and the end of the letter was written crosswise above the salutation.

Envelopes were not used in the early days, and it was customary to write only on one side of the paper, fold it in envelope fashion, and seal it with wax. Men usually used red wax, and women gilt, rose, or the pastel colors. The seals were small, as large ones were considered in bad taste.

If the letter contained even the smallest piece of paper, the postage was doubled, and this was paid, not by the sender, but by

the recipient, who might not have the necessary twenty-five cents. As a consequence, the letter might have to wait in the post office a considerable length of time before the money could be gathered together. The Bloomington Pantagraph periodically published the lists of uncalled-for mail waiting in the local post office. Sometimes as many as one-hundred and fifty letters were listed.

The Pantagraph also gave the schedule of mail deliveries. The mail was brought from Springfield to Bloomington twice a week. The post boy left Springfield at 7 a.m. and arrived in Bloomington at 5 p.m. the next day.

After the railroads were built and they began to carry the mail, the postage rules were changed, so that it was the writer who furnished the stamps.

A young man who had to leave town for a time would present some stamps to his beloved, the number of which depended upon his pocketbook as well as the frequency of the letters he desired. It was considered extremely unethical for a girl to use the stamps given to her by one boy, to write letters to another. If any such perfidy was discovered, it was considered by everyone as being good and sufficient grounds for him to break the engagement.

As amusements for the Fairbury young people, picnics were always extremely popular. These ranged from the big picnics of various organizations, with four-horse “busses” hired from the livery stables; and the Sunday School picnics where the children and young folks rode out to the grove on hay racks; down to the small fishing and nutting parties. There were many black walnut, hickory, and chestnut trees around Fairbury, and every family with youngsters made at least one trip to the woods each fall for their winter’s supply.

Their fishing picnics were picnics actually with plenty of fish to eat. A thirty-pound sturgeon was caught near town; and, since seining was still permitted, although dynamiting was not, three men came back from an afternoon’s trip on the Little Vermillion with three hundred pounds of fish, which they gave away on the street corners downtown.

There were moonlight picnics in the woods near town, and since

most of the young people had their own saddle horses, in summer, after school was out, they had riding parties, with the couples riding two by two, and the girls always sitting side saddle; or it might be a group of girls together.

Also, for dates, there were the church festivals to attend, and roller skating parties; and, for several winters, they enjoyed tobogganing.

The boys contrived their toboggan slide when the pile of slack at the east coal shaft had grown large enough to offer genuine possibilities. There were no houses to block the flight from the forty-foot elevation, and with some work to board and flood it, they managed to get a distance of about four hundred feet. They made steps up the other side of the hill, and built a warming shack on the top; and since most of these prairie children had never known the pleasures of coasting down a real hill, this toboggan slide was heavily patronized.

In addition to all this, different groups of girls gave taffy pulls, surprise parties, and parties with music and guessing games as the main part of the amusement. Sometimes a note of coyness was added, as when the girls donned sheets and pillow cases and rotated around the room, talking to each young man in turn, and inviting him to guess identities; or, when a collection of the girls' baby photographs was posted on the living room wall, and the boys tried to guess which one was their girl.

Another form of entertainment the young people enjoyed were the serenades, and often on fine nights, groups of girls or a few couples, would wander about town with a guitar or mandolin, making music. Sometimes the boys of the Cornet Band, on their way home from band practice, would stop and salute some favored person.

Once in a while a group of young men would get together and hire a good orchestra to go with them to pay their respects to their sweethearts on some special occasion, such as New Year's night, so as to finish in style the day devoted to formal calls. The custom of New Year calls was dying out, but the mothers of the more popular girls still held open house on New Year's Day. The Blade notified the public in advance, and there was a good deal of rivalry between the ladies about the number of callers, as well as who called. The

serenade made the perfect finishing touch.

For the long summer evenings, there was tennis, or croquet; and, every week or so, a concert in the park by the Fairbury Band.

The history of that band was a hectic one. As early as 1876, which was not long after the Amsbary feud, there was a Cornet Band, and that one played for the Fourth of July celebrations and other special occasions. It died a lingering death.

There was much musical talent and interest, and so, a couple of years later, the Fairbury Brass Band was organized, and the Village Board had a municipal bandstand erected on the Commons. The band was so popular that George Franzen, himself a member, was sent to Chicago the next year to buy new instruments for them, and grand balls were given to raise the money. Things were going beautifully until Professor Jones, their director, allowed the girls to join.

It was not long: "The Fairbury Brass Band had busted. The members pulled straws for the furniture, and declared a dividend with the money. We thought they might reorganize, but didn't say anything about the rupture last week, but as the bust appears to be unanimous, there is no use hiding it any longer."

There was next a feeble effort to organize a Juvenile Band. It played at Custer Park, and then expired from the effort. There was also a Fairbury Colored Band which was good enough to play at Starved Rock. Then the Fairbury Military Band rose, like the Phoenix, from the ashes of its predecessors.

The old bandstand in the Commons had long since collapsed from disuse, and so a handsome new one was erected in Marsh Park, which by now had achieved the purpose for which John Marsh had originally intended it. Here they gave their concerts, paying for their expenses with the usual benefit balls, promenades, and skating parties.

The railroads always played a prominent part in the social life, and whenever an evening train came into the depot bringing a group of gaily dressed people, it was safe to assume that they were on their way to the Opera House.

Now the Opera House was the old Fairbury Hall under a new ownership, and purged of the atheism which had died with the East and West feud. It had been bought by Mr. T. E. DuBois, who obliterated the date on the stage curtain. He gave the interior a coat of paint, provided an organ, and renamed the place the Opera House. Scibird was immensely gratified by the changes, and said that the new name was “very metropolitan and dignified”.

The Opera House, circa 1887.

With this, the new amusement center of Fairbury got off to a fine start. The whole country was full of troupes of entertainers who traveled among the little towns in one night stands, and Fairbury was well-known among them, as it provided a good stage, decent dressing rooms, and full, enthusiastic audiences for good shows. People from surrounding towns were glad to come in by train, for Fairbury had the reputation of being the best “show town” downstate.

The advertising showed that a real variety was offered. Not only

did they have “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”, “Rip Van Winkle”, “East Lyme”, and other dramas by Herbert’s Dramatic Constellation, and similar troupes, but they also heard “The Pinafore”, and a Junior Opera Company presented the “Mikado”. Minstrels and medicine shows were very popular. They had concerts, one of them presented by the Madame Fry Company of Boston; another by Blind Tom, the famous colored musical prodigy. There were burlesque troupes, comedians, ventriloquists, illusionists, mind readers, dog and pony shows, and dramatic recitationists. They also had a Hibernicon, and a Calcichromapticon entertainment. The latter was stereoptican views.

Then there were lectures. These covered a variety of subjects, such as “The Yosemite and California”; “Geneva and the Alps”; “The Great Battle of Gettysburg”; “The Mound Builders”; “The Assassin Guiteau”; “Puerto Rico”; and phrenology. One of the most famous of the speakers was George W. Cable, a well-known author. He was warmly received, and gave a fine talk.

Perhaps the most ambitious of the dramas presented, at least scenically, was “The Fast Mail”. This boasted ten sets of special scenery, that included Niagara Falls by Moonlight with boiling mist; a practical working engine, and fourteen freight cars with an illuminated caboose; a Dago dive; a realistic river scene, and steamboat explosion; “and a hundred other startling effects”.

Sometimes, to drum up an audience, the entertainers gave a street parade and concert before the performance. A Professor Harrington, the Illusionist and Ventriloquist, advertised free gifts to each and every one on his opening night. A hopeful scribe attended, and then disgustedly reported that the “handsome gifts” were only cheap sleeve buttons, shirt studs and lead pencils.

In slack seasons of entertainment, the Opera House could be used as a roller skating rink, as that was always popular and profitable. They introduced novelties to incite public interest and draw crowds, such as masquerades, and “turkey races”. At the latter, a number of skaters were blindfolded, and then a turkey was turned loose on the floor. The person who caught the turkey got to keep it, and the fun and excitement were terrific.

The place was also in great demand by the churches. The

Catholics had capacity crowds for their entertainments, as did the African Methodist Christmas Eve festivals.

The firemen gave their dances at the Opera House. These were benefits to help out with their meager pay, and to provide new helmets and coats. Apart from their actual duties, the firemen regarded themselves as a social organization, holding regular fire fighting practices, with George Franzen, secretary, to record all the proceedings. They were a feature of the Fourth of July parades, and for years their ball was an important annual event. Sometimes it was a New Year's Eve affair; other times, perhaps, a masquerade. For one of them, held on Christmas night, the gallery was decorated on either side with sections of hose trimmed with evergreens. A large "Welcome", also in evergreens, covered one wall, with pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln at either end, and flags were liberally used to fill in the gaps.

At least one annual dance was given by practically every organization in town. There were grand balls for Thanksgiving night, carnivals, and cake walks, soiree dansants, cotillions, and "Calico Swarrys"; but the peak of the social season were the balls given by Professor Vaughan's dancing class.

Professor Vaughan, for years, conducted classes in "the Art Terpsichorean", and he looked a typical dancing teacher. He was small and dapper, with a little moustache, and he always wore evening clothes to conduct his classes. A membership to one of these was obligatory to anyone with social pretensions. He was careful to provide a good orchestra, and he never permitted anyone but his own pupils to dance "the Lancers", which was full of complicated figures, for fear that they would make a mistake.

The Knight Templars began their balls at nine o'clock, because of the late train which brought the Chenoa crowd. The guests danced until twelve, when they went across to the Thomas House for a turkey dinner, and then they came back and danced until four in the morning.

For more serious purposes, the Opera House was used to raise charity funds for the Johnstown Flood, and Yellow Fever sufferers, and the poverty-stricken Nebraska colonists. Once, when a boy drowned in the Vermillion River, hundreds of men met at the Opera

House first before going out in searching parties; and public prayers were offered there for President Garfield when he was shot by a disappointed office seeker.

Protracted meetings were held at the Opera House by the Prohibitionists before elections. One of these meetings was followed by such a flood of rain, that some of the more superstitious inhabitants regarded it as a sign from heaven.

The meeting, however, which seemed to arouse the most intense interest of all, was the “open” one of the Modern Woodmen.

Now when the Woodmen and Masons organized in Fairbury, they were very nearly the death of all non-members. Perhaps their manner was a bit supercilious towards the uninitiated. At any rate, the suffering they caused was not borne in silence.

The members stayed out a little late, too, sometimes; but one wife got even with her husband about it. He was pretty thoroughly fagged out when, at last, he got his clothes off and climbed into bed. He had scarcely closed his eyes, when the wife by his side was seized with violent cramps, and the luckless husband spent the remainder of the night on his feet, keeping the fires going and applying poultices. Every time he would slow down a little, her horrifying groans would grow louder, and centuries later, when daylight finally came and he staggered downtown to work, he was convinced that she was not long for this world.

The ladies had a wonderful time laughing about it afterwards, but they were no nearer to finding out what their husbands were really doing, and finally their curiosity reached such a pitch that the men could no longer disregard it.

Whereupon, the Modern Woodmen advertised a meeting to be held at the Opera House in which their own complete secret ritual was to be given, adults 15 cents, children 10 cents; and they added that they hoped the other secret societies would follow the idea. The audience was packed to the eaves that night, only to find that the whole thing was a hoax.

The most popular of all the diversions, later on, was the bicycle, and one reason was that, unlike a horse, they took very little care. So, with the combined pleasure and convenience, the bicycle grew

into a craze. Everyone had one, and the horses, which had been so badly frightened at first, learned to ignore them.

The Village Board was compelled to stop the racing on the streets, and the riding on the sidewalks. Johnny McDowell was caught, arrested and fined, all in good order. The marshal, however, made the mistake of asking him not to say anything about it, so that he might make more arrests and fines. Johnny promptly told about the proposition, and the marshal was very much embarrassed when he was called upon to explain it.

The Blade, June 4, 1893: "A petition was numerously signed this week praying the village council not to entirely prohibit the use of the streets for bicycle riders, but asking for an ordinance making it a penalty for a rider to pass a pedestrian on sidewalks without dismounting; prohibit riding on sidewalks after dark; prohibit bicycles on Main street at any time."

The young people formed bicycle clubs and took all day trips to Forrest or to Pontiac, sometimes taking to the railroad tracks, which were smoother than the coal slack roads. They had parades of fifty or more, with their wheels decorated with colored paper and Japanese lanterns, or umbrellas tied to the handle bars. Bicycle races, introduced as a feature of the Fairbury Fair, became immensely popular.

Less than a generation later, Fairbury was to boast that it was the motorcycle capital of the world. There were over three hundred of them in town; more, per capita, than any other place. One of the riders, Carl Goudy, set records as a professional racer, and became a national hero of the sport.

The Fairbury boys formed a motorcycle club which gathered in Central Park at the city hall during good weather, and then the cyclists would leave on a prearranged trip.

As to automobiles, even after they had become somewhat more common after the turn of the Century, they were no casual means of transportation. The roads precluded that. The cars were built high off the ground because of the mud, and the running boards were necessary to step into them.

Motorists went home when it began to rain, because the roads

were all plain dirt and became unbelievably slippery when wet. Moreover, the ditches on either side were deep. Those who ventured into Indiana were amazed at the roads there. The sandy soil made roads that were so much smoother, and dried quickly after a rain.

There were only a few cars, but they did add to the civic problems. “The city council has been a little slow in passing an ordinance governing the speed of automobiles and other conveyances and the only law covering them now is the state law which allows them to be driven at the rate of 15 miles an hour. An ordinance is now up before the council, which will limit the speed of automobiles to eight miles an hour within the city limits and to five miles an hour over crossings.”

There were no age limits to operate a car, and no drivers tests, but they had to know how to make their own repairs. The tool box was on the right hand running board.

There were no service stations. The owners greased the cars themselves, and they had to know how to patch a tire and inflate it with a bicycle pump. In the case of an accident, they hunted up a farmer with a team of horses.

A little ride into the country in early December was a red letter day to be marveled at. Afterwards, they put a tarpaulin over their car for the winter, and jacked it up to save the tires.

In summer weather, the standard equipment of goggles and duster coat was really needed, for the cars were open and the dust was thick.

Side curtains were carried under the back seat cushions. The gas tank was under the driver’s seat. the steering wheel was on the right side, with a rubber bulb to sound the horn.

There were no rear lamps, and the two brass lamps in front, on either side of the brass radiator, were lit with a match.

The top of the car could be lowered, and even after they became stationary they had bows across the top to hold it in shape. Those were a hazard, because the roads were full of ruts, chuck holes and rocks, and they were very rough unless they had just been dragged. Sometimes the driver would become engrossed in conversation and

become careless, and when he hit one the back seat passengers were thrown against a bow of the top and really hurt.

People of all ages loved driving in the country in fine weather, whether by buggy, horseback or auto. It was beautiful, with the woods in the distance following the curves of the river along three sides of the town, and the hedgerows, miles after miles of them, outlining every farm.

The roads between the hedges were little winding lanes, two dusty ruts in summer, divided by a ribbon of grass between them. There were ditches on either side where the cattails grew, and wild flowers in profusion.

The fields were a checkerboard, each neatly fenced, and every two miles, on the corner, was a little country school house set among the trees of its playground.

There were at least two or three houses, each with its complete set of farm buildings, to every mile, for 160 acres was considered a good family size farm; and there was activity as far as the eye could see. Every farm had a lot of animals, horses, mules, cattle, hogs and sheep in the pastures and barnlots. Occasionally some of them were out in the road, having jumped the fence or crawled under it, or a cow would be tethered by the roadside, and there were always chickens wandering about.

Out in the fields, horses and mules pulled wagons and farm machinery. Around the houses the women hung up washing on the lines, fed the chickens and ducks, and worked in the gardens. Their yards were filled with lilac bushes, and beds of roses, iris, peonies and tiger lillies. Even today, one can see little patches of the lillies by the roadside, living memorials of the home that once stood there.

All this dating was done under the watchful eyes of the girl's parents. The young men who took her out were grilled by her father about their morals, antecedents, and financial prospects, while her mother took charge of her wardrobe and the instructions on behavior. The idea was to make an eligible man come right out and commit himself.

Attire, as always, being important in the attracting of a husband, the ladies of Fairbury took the fashions seriously.

For their better clothes they went on all-day shopping trips to Peoria or Chicago, but twice a year the mothers had a local dressmaker come to the home for several days to “sew up” the family, and to regale them with the gossip of her other customers.

She ripped the old clothing of the adults of the family at the seams, turned the good material inside out, and remade it for the children. These garments were then handed down from one child to another. Left-over scraps of new cloth were used to make quilts. Old cloths went into rag rugs.

Thrift was ever the watch word. When the Fugate farm home burned with everything in it, the family found shelter with friends. The following morning, father Fugate went to the store and bought one whole bolt of calico. From this the entire family was outfitted: pants, shirts, dresses, and including all underwear.

Materials were honest, and so were the dyes. They were intended to last, and a girl was taught to shop for values. A silk dress was considered to be of good quality if it could stand alone, but such silks required special care. “To wash black silks, warm some small beer and mix milk in it; then wash your silk in the liquid and it will give you a fine color.”

Until Eli Whitney’s gin rendered cotton plentiful, a woman’s best dress and her wedding dress were made of it, and her second-best dress was silk. Her everyday dresses were of wool or homespun.

The beautiful hoop skirts, bonnets and paisley shawls of the post Civil War period were modified by the 1890’s, to become the bustles, leg-of-mutton sleeves, and elaborate “picture” hats.

Skirt measurements were supposed to be exact; they should touch the floor on front and sides, with a three-inch train in the back. Manipulating these through the mud demanded close attention, for they might be raised to ankle height, and not a quarter of an inch farther.

During the nineties, when the skirt and shirt waist combination was so popular, the combined weight of petticoats and skirts was sometimes too much to be worn comfortably. Then they used a kind of harness to suspend it all from the shoulders.

Hats and gloves, winter and summer, were required for outdoors by the more refined; and one of the popular women's magazines agreed that "the putting on of one's gloves in the presence of a man is quite permissible."

Diamonds were never worn in the morning. Jewelry was real.

Lavender was the color for old ladies, the pastel shades were for the girls, and the darker, more conservative colors, for the matrons.

Winter or summer, women dressed completely martyred to respectability. First of all came the chemise, or "shimmy", as it was called in Fairbury; and then, for that fashionable hourglass figure, the whale bone corset.

For years, ladies laced their corsets to the limit of human endurance, in order to have a tiny waist. It took vigorous work to get it as small as desired, and these corsets were worn straight through the summer, even in "good corn weather", for it was unbearable to put one on again after the period of freedom.

"Good corn weather" is that breathless, searing, day-and-night, steamy heat of the prairie mid-summer, when the farmers say they can lie awake at night and "listen to the corn grow".

Some of the women, accustomed to very tight stays, complained that they could not sit upright without them, and were sometimes even compelled to wear them to bed. It caused all sorts of internal disorders, and fainting spells were so common that the tight laced always carried little bottles of smelling salts with them. Fainting was considered to be a sign of sweet femininity, and desirable in a young lady during courtship.

Ladies used camomile tea extensively for its soothing qualities to mitigate their resulting nervousness, but even this tea was said to be dangerous. "Too great moisture is to be avoided. Females who are much addicted to tea and other water diet are especially liable to hysterics and all the dreadful consequences."

The "corset cover" worn over the chemise, was a dainty under-waist of lace, ribbons, and embroidery. Then the white muslin drawers. Those buttoned in the back, and ended below the knees with an embroidered ruffle.

A couple of petticoats came next. The cotton ones had ribbon bows on eyelet embroidery ruffles. The silk petticoats had ruffles, too, and they made an entrancing rustle as one moved.

Stockings were long, and of serviceable black cotton. Shoes were of the high button or laced styles. Their leather was stiff, and one way for a girl to earn pin money was by "breaking in" the shoes of an affluent matron whose foot was the same size.

Over all went the dress. Its neck was high, and boned to stay erect to the ear lobes. The "leg of Mutton" sleeves were huge, and the voluminous skirts were plentifully draped with lace fringe and braid. The dresses were designed to protrude in top front, and so a band of starched ruffles sometimes had to be used to fill out an insufficient bosom. A bustle took care of the hip line.

The Blade told of one underprivileged girl in a neighboring town, "whose folks don't take any paper and are too stingy to give her pocket money, made a bustle for herself by cutting a pumpkin in half".

Petersen's Magazine of the 1880's advertised the "Patent Eureka Air Bustle": "It is light, flexible and always retains its shape no matter how heavy the skirts. It may be instantly enlarged or reduced to any desired size or shape, and when not in use may be folded away as easily as a pocket handkerchief. It is washed as easily as any other garment. It is a perfect bustle, a complete cushion for the back, a pillow, unequalled for traveling purposes, and in case of accidentally falling into the water, may be relied upon as an admirable Life Preserver. Retail price $2.75."

Feminine hair styles, at least in the case of the younger women, were as elaborate as their clothes. There was not a permanent wave in all the land, but straight hair was a blight they refused to accept. Long iron tongs, heated over a kerosene lamp or upon the cook stove, corrected that, and some of the girls managed a spectacular frizz by braiding their hair tightly and then pressing it with a hot flat-iron. Loose, and hanging down the back, this was called a "waterfall".

Curls were extremely popular, especially to drape across one's shoulder, but there were perils in this, as a story in a Sunday magazine made clear. The heroine, madly in love with a young man,

sought to make herself more attractive to him by wearing a false curl. It did draw his attention, sure enough, and she seemed to be succeeding nicely until they attended a dinner party together. Her curl fell off in her soup, and he was lost to her forever.

Almost every heroine of romance had naturally blonde, curly hair, and so the real life girls continued to add curls, switches, and "rats" to their own. One good reason why they sometimes moved so sedately was that they were afraid the spare parts would fall off.

A matron, after bearing a few children, was apt to discard the fancier hair styles, and came to draw her tresses straight up without a part into a knob on the crown of the head, skewering it securely with five or six substantial bone hairpins. An ornamental comb was added in the back to give further security for the shorter hairs at the neck.

Their hair was their glory, and it commonly hung almost to the waist. The only time it was ever touched with scissors was to snip off the very ends of it to encourage the growth; and every night she gave it the ritual hundred strokes of the brush before she braided it for bed. All the hair that came out in the brush was carefully made into a little ball and put into a flowered china "hair receiver", which was part of her dresser equipment. When enough hair had been accumulated, it was sent away to be made into a switch for herself, or it was used for "rats", that repulsive, homemade padding for the more elaborate hair styles. Later it might be used to make the wig of a very special doll for a little daughter.

Shampoos were never lightly undertaken. "In cleansing the hair, it is wisest not to use too much water, or else in drying there would be much trouble and the odor would be unpleasant. Use a small bowl of hot water and a toothbrush. Scrub the scalp well with the toothbrush, after having dissolved in the water a small lump of kitchen soap. Dip the hair into the basin of hot water and wring it out very quickly, so that the water has no time to soak the hair. It would not advise washing the hair more than twice a month."

Even personal cleanliness was fraught with danger. A horse hair glove was recommended for the bath, but "no man or woman should take a bath at the close of the day unless by the advice of the family physician."

For perspiring feet: “Wash every morning in lukewarm water using a little soap. Change the stockings twice a week in winter and three times in summer.”

Still, even with all her efforts, a plain girl remained a plain girl, with none of the drug-store artifices to disguise a muddy complexion, or to give her the bloom of health. It was considered daring to crush rose petals to tint one’s lips, and only a prostitute or an actress would even think of rouging her cheeks. A slight touch of white rice powder, however, was allowed on special occasions to alleviate a shiny nose.

Since no camouflage of the complexion was permitted, each woman was most solicitous of the one she had, carefully shielding it from the sun and weather by parasols; and some women riding horseback wore face masks. The idea of a sun tan would have been shocking, for a milky white complexion was one of the attributes of a gentlewoman.

Most of the beauty treatments in early Fairbury were home-made, and the family cook books of the period were filled with recipes to make a woman more attractive. A paste for the hands called for “one pound of sweet almonds, quarter of a pound of bread crumbs, one pint of spring water, the same quantity of brandy, and the yolks of two eggs. Blanch the almonds, pound them and sprinkle them with vinegar, that the paste may not turn to oil. Add bread crumbs, brandy and egg yolks. Get this mixture over a slow fire and keep stirring lest the mixture should adhere to the bottom of the pan.”

Another of the cook books also had a “Pomade for Removing Wrinkles”: “Take two ounces of the juice of onions, the same quantity of the white lilly, the same of honey, and one ounce of white wax. Put the whole thing into a new tin pan in a warm place, until the wax is melted. Keep stirring the mixture with a wooden spoon until quite cold. You will then have an excellent ointment for removing wrinkles. It must be applied at night, on going to bed, and not wiped off until morning.”

Then, as now, the magazines for women were comprised of recipes, fashion, beauty hints, instructions in etiquette, articles about health, the care of children, and household management. The love stories they contained were all carefully pure. All the heroes

were tall, dark, and handsome. Sterling character and virtue were always triumphant in the end. The Cinderella theme was the most popular one, since it carried reassurance for the plain girls. Be a virtuous woman, they said, a good housekeeper, and, above all, a good cook, for "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

The editors of these magazines were male, naturally, since women were not supposed to do such intellectual work, and sometimes the men appeared to regard their vocation as unworthy of their superior talents. They seemed to be uncomfortably aware of having only feather-brained women for an audience, and never failed to hurl a tremendous sermon at them, as a reminder that they had been reading a magazine instead of occupying themselves to a much better advantage by doing a little housework.

A girl's training to be a good housewife began early.

As soon as the toddler was old enough to manage a needle, she was taught to sew in fine, even stitches, then to make a perfect buttonhole, and darn a stocking. By the time she had reached her teens, she was embroidering linens for her "hope chest", even though she may not have settled on any young man. From then on, she was seldom without something to keep herself occupied.

People lived by mottos, in those days, and one of the favorites was: "Satan finds work for idle hands to do."

If a girl sat down for a few minutes, she was expected to be busy with some sort of needlework or knitting. In the afternoons, while she was resting, she would be working with her embroidery. This was elaborate, and some of it was highly colored. All the better household linens: the sheets and pillow cases, guest towels, dresser scarves, tablecloths, and napkins, and "best" aprons, were all hand-hemstitched, and embroidered with monograms and designs. Her work made treasured gifts for birthdays and Christmas.

For the men of her family, she embroidered really sensational slippers, fezzes, vests and collar boxes, and a man who did not have several of each must have thought that his women folk no longer loved him.

Patches and darning, both works of art in themselves, and the general mending were done in the evening when the family had

gathered around the sitting room table, and her father read aloud.

Tatting and crocheting were popular to take along for a social afternoon, as the work was small and easily carried. Tatting was done with a shuttle, and it was particularly recommended as an edging for children's panties, which they called "drawers". "One of the strongest trimmings as can be done at odd moments, in the dusk, and when visiting, it is particularly suitable work for mothers."

As the daughter grew older, she increasingly helped her mother with the housework, cooking, and family mending. The assistance was needed, but nevertheless, it was a period of training to teach her to manage a home of her own efficiently. A husband would be expected to provide a good living for her; and he would expect her to make a comfortable life for him.

To enhance her social attractiveness, she was given piano and singing lessons; and she learned to play a mandolin or guitar. She took painting lessons, in water color or oils, on canvas or china. If she showed any aptitude in school, she had private lessons in elocution, French or German; and, of course, she belonged to Professor Vaughan's dancing class.

Yet, in spite of all the intensive culture, there was scarcely any biological information given her.

Sex was considered evil, and something which must not be mentioned. Innocence, which is usually another name for ignorance, was stressed as such, and it was a girl's husband, not her mother, who was supposed to teach her about the birds and the bees.

That innocence, which was to be preserved at all costs, compelled a continuously watchful eye on the part of her parents. It was their constant fear lest she "compromise" herself. They were ever on the alert lest their girl, willingly or unwillingly, be caught in a questionable place or situation, for everyone would immediately suspect the worst. The young man, unless he was an unspeakable cad, would be expected to marry her, for there were only two kinds of women: the good and the bad. The line of demarcation was distinct, to be stepped over at one's peril.

For the girl, no matter what her position in society, there was no

second chance, and more than one family doctor perjured himself, if he could, by announcing a birth as premature, to save a girl's reputation.

If the man failed to marry her, she paid for her ignorance all the rest of her life. She was disowned by her family, and, so utterly did public opinion despise her, that no respectable girl dared to bring legal suit against a man. There were no institutions where the unfortunate girl might go, and no help for her after her baby was born. Furthermore, her child was as ostracized as she. Few employers would hire a "fallen woman", so that there was often only one way by which she could earn a living, and that by prostitution.

The young men, on the other hand, were expected, even encouraged, to sow a generous crop of wild oats. It was considered that they settled down for marriage all the more satisfactorily for having had their fling, and were less apt to meet middle age with an emotional crisis. There might be a scandal, but if the youth behaved himself thereafter, he was able to live it down.

As for the unmarried woman, it was usually her lot to care for an ailing parent, often a state of actual slavery; or she was at the beck and call of her married sisters, to help with their housework, or to nurse their children through measles and chicken pox. With all the inferior status, frustration, and overwork, it is small wonder that "old maid" was sometimes a term implying a state of nasty, crabbed irritability.

Because of this dread of being unmarried, courtship was often a cutthroat affair, all the more deadly for very reason of its sentimental refinements. A man was considered fair game until the marriage ceremony actually had been said over him, and many an engaged couple attended a house party, only to have their romance broken up by a more vigorous girl, who lost no time whatever in getting the man to the altar. It was the age of the blushing, shrinking female, certainly, but she carried a skinning knife with her.

The engaged girl who had been jilted sometimes took to her bed to become an invalid, thus placing her broken heart on exhibit. These "declines", as they were called, were considered highly interesting, and were the correct thing to do. Also, there was always the possibility that the man's conscience, goaded by public opinion,

might drive him back. There was no advice for the lovelorn in any of the newspapers or magazines to tell her to get up, get busy, and forget him. Anyway, her own mother never would have permitted it.

Once a young man had become serious about a girl, and had escorted her to the various church suppers, festivals and plays, and had taken her tobogganing down the coal shaft hill, it was considered very fitting for him to serenade her personally.

To do this really in style took a team of horses and a wagon. The latter had to be scrubbed out first, and then four torchlights were fastened to the corners. He loaded an organ into it, collected some of his friends with guitars, and set out.

Almost inevitably, the following night his good friends burlesqued his fervent efforts, and their caterwauling was in no way calculated to increase his popularity with any of the villagers who wanted to sleep.

After that, it was practically over but the wedding. These were quiet home affairs, for it had not yet become the custom to have attendants.

Only the relatives and close friends were invited, but naturally everyone was interested in everything. Until 1889, the Blade not only published a list of the guests, but also their gifts.

Brides were expected to help with all the preparations. Emma Bartlett Taylor's wedding dress, according to the Blade, was from Paris and cost $300.00, yet she was hanging garlands the day before, when she fell from the chair and sprained her ankle. Nevertheless, she got up in the middle of the night and made seven cakes for her wedding.

The weddings were decorous, sometimes with a band to serenade them after the ceremony, but the charivari the bridal couples received after they returned from their wedding trip, tore the top off the town. All the boys and a good many of the men got together, with every pan, horn, and cow bell they could lay hands on. They marched in a body to surround the house of the newlyweds and deafen them with their noise. The amount of racket they produced, supposedly corresponded with the popularity of the couple. It continued, too, until the beaming bridegroom decided they had made enough bedlam, and came out on the porch to stand treat for

the crowd, whereupon, the boys were supposed to take themselves off.

“The charivari Monday night with fife, drums, tin pans and old boots, was a dreadful racket, long-drawn out, and was heard all over town. Have mercy on the citizens, boys, and don’t do so again.”

The year that Tommy Beach put his stone lions in his front yard, one on either side of the walk, thereby fascinating the children of the town who were none too sure about them, also saw the wedding of his nephew, Charlie Perlee. When the charivari broke out in the Beach yard, the children living across the street were terrorized. They were heard to screech even above the din: “Oh, Ma! Ma! Come QUICK! Beach’s lions is busted loose!”

The charivaris grew worse and worse with each successive wedding, until they finally became such an outstanding nuisance that the state legislature, in 1902, passed a law prohibiting them.

The T. A. Beach resid

CHAPTER XI
The Lady and the House

There was a saying, common at the time, that at forty a woman was a fool, a drudge, or a saint.

Many were frankly old by then, and had lost a tooth for every child they had borne.

Their marriages were intended to last. Problems were to be solved by understanding and concession. Divorce was a disgrace and the principals were ostracized. The husband might cut a caper or two, but he came back home when it was over, and an out-and-out case of desertion could always be explained as having gone west to the gold fields.

The general conception of a woman's marital situation was that God had made her man the way he was, and therefore it was unseemly for her to try and change his ways. It was her duty to get along.

That was the key word: duty.

A woman had her duty to her husband; her duty to her children; her duty to her parents. She also had her duty to her church, her friends, and society in general. They, in turn, each had their duty to her. It was the mutual acceptance of personal responsibility for the welfare of others, and there were no government agencies to ease the burden.

She had no identity of her own, but was known as "Mrs. Doctor Brewer", or "Mrs. Judge McDowell". If he died, she did not lose her status, but all too often she found herself close to poverty with no business training.

Her husband was the head of the house in reality, and she had been taught from babyhood to so regard him. He was the breadwinner, and his family were dependent upon him.

As a good provider, he worked hard and long hours. He automatically expected to give an honest day's work in return for his wages, and he expected to receive an honest day's work for any wages he paid out.

He had a sense of permanence about his work. The land he tilled

and the business he established were planned for his children and grandchildren. His home was built to shelter generations. His sons were expected to enter his business, and as they prospered and married, he built houses for them close to his own. Sunday dinners together were an established custom, and the holidays were family festivals.

The Beach Family — Mr. and Mrs. Thomas A. Beach [seated]. Standing, from left, Mamie Lewis [Ficklin], Doctor George Canby Lewis, Mrs. Ella Beach Lewis, and Tommy Beach Lewis. The child seated in front, Alma Lewis [James].

There was no possible question about his wife having a career outside her home. It was considered a disgrace for a married woman to have to earn her living, and many a woman suffered actual privation rather than admit to the public that her husband was too shiftless to support her.

Even when charity became organized, the only place the penniless could go was the “Poor House”, provided by each county, and they would endure almost anything rather than suffer that shame.

Consequently, a man's home was an open statement to the public of his success in the business world. It also was the personal accomplishment of his wife, in which she took great pride, for her standing in the community depended largely upon the kind of a house she managed. It was just as much her job to secure the comfort and welfare of her family as it was for her husband to supply the money and the discipline.

His was the voice of authority, and the moral hazards of the time were so great that they led Abe Filley to proclaim emphatically, that the only way to raise a boy, was to "keep him in a barrel and feed him through the bung hole".

The authors were explicit: "The first lesson is obedience. He must obey at the first command. The parent has absolute authority and should never let disobedience escape effective punishment".

"The allowance is a luxury and has a deteriorating influence. The use of money is not a right, but an indulgence."

"A boy of nine who brags and lies is well on his way to becoming a dishonest and thoroughly untrustworthy person. Sternest measures must be taken. Every time he lies, wash his mouth out with strong soap and shame him."

"Spare the rod and spoil the child."

Right was right. Wrong was wrong. Sin was sin.

It was no easy matter for a loving, concerned father to reconcile his own inclinations with his duty as a parent, the teachings of his church, and the demands of his own mother-in-law.

Discipline was intended to teach children to face the realities of life. Birth, sickness and death occurred in the home, and must be faced with fortitude.

Their early years were viewed as the training period for the responsibilities they would assume as adults, and answer for, finally, on Judgement Day.

So his children were whipped for wrong doing and disobedience; but the day the trip to the woodshed ended in a free-for-all wrestling match marked the date of the emancipation of his son. His daughters never achieved that status.

A married womans duty was to have a large family of good-looking, well-behaved children. Consequently, between the frequent periods of child bearing and mourning, her best dresses were often in retirement.

Since the figure of a pregnant woman was considered too indecent for public appearance, when she found she could no longer endure her corsets, she withdrew into her home and the comfort of a "Mother Hubbard", a beltless, shapeless gown with the fullness hung from the shoulders, to wait out her term.

Miscarriages were frequent, but even after normal child birth, she spent two weeks flat on her back in bed, and was forbidden to raise her head from the pillow.

In effect, her confinements were vacation periods. Relatives came in to care for the family and manage the house, and she had nothing to do but enjoy her new baby, and all the attention they were getting.

An older daughter, or a teen-age relative, was assigned the care of the infant, which was invaluable training for her, since just learning to dress one neatly was an accomplishment in itself.

First, there was the binder. This was a band going around the abdomen to hold the navel in place. On a squirming baby, there was a trick to getting this smooth and firm without being uncomfortably tight, and after a few sessions, the novice began to learn how to use her elbows and forearms as well as her hands.

The little shirt went over this, and it was pinned to the diapers to make doubly sure the abdomen was warmly covered at all times. Then came long wool stockings, and the "pinning blanket", which was a sort of long woolen petticoat on a wide band. The skirt of this was folded back up over the legs, on the theory that if the legs and stomach were kept really warm, the baby would be less apt to be colicky. A yard long, white ruffled and embroidered petticoat and dress completed the outfit. Then the baby was wrapped in a blanket, and was ready to face the world.

Babies were beloved members of their families from their very first cry, and as soon as they could sit up they had their own high chair at the dinner table.

The authority boys already had begun to sound a note of dietary

caution for the young. The instructions went thus: “Fruit should be used sparingly for children under three, especially bananas. After a year old, if your baby is in perfect health, he may have a teaspoon of orange juice occasionally.”

Older children needed to be watched: “It has been noticed that several children have died from convulsions produced by the eating of the skins of raisins. Dr. Dewes of Boston mentions the death of three children and remarks there is no stomach unless it be that of an ostrich that can master the skin of a raisin.”

Nothing was said about the doting grandfather who slipped the baby a chunk of homemade pickle or sips of coffee. Furthermore, it was the child’s inalienable right to hold his own bone of chicken leg with a dollop of mashed potatoes and gravy on the end of it. This was frequently replenished and licked with satisfaction throughout the meal.

Not only were new babies being added to the family, but grandparents came to live with them as well. The mother cared for their needs as she did for her own family. She nursed young and old through their sicknesses, and she was stunned with grief when her ministrations failed.

Sometimes, when the limits of her strength and patience had been reached, she “declined”.

It was just a “giving up”, a passive resistance, the one effective way a woman had of coping with a life that had become too much of a problem; and a woman could get by with murder with a physical ailment.

Thus, “declining”, in the cozy security of her bed with the shades of her room lowered against the too insistent sunlight, her wants were attended, while her door remained firmly closed against the intrusion of household commotion, quarrelling children, or a difficult husband. It was complete bliss to an exhausted woman to listen to her family worrying along, trying to find lost articles of clothing, getting meals, keeping the house in some form of running order, and seeing how they liked taking care of themselves without her. It was certain to give them a brand new perspective. Some women needed a few weeks before they felt sufficiently restored to resume family life; some took months; a few took years; and fewer yet stayed there until they died.

A man was powerless against this sort of thing, because public sympathy was all with the woman. He may have considered himself guiltless, but the looks he got from his friends and neighbors indicated he must have had it coming to him.

There was, however, one Fairbury husband who beat the game. He was genuinely fond of his wife, and he had tried every way he could think of to get her back on her feet again. Whatever her reason was, she simply had no interest in herself or anything that went on. Every attempt he made to rouse her attention met with the blankest indifference.

After a year of this, he came into his wife's room and told her he had bought the lot next door, and was going to build her a beautiful new house there.

No interest.

He tried to consult her about the architect's plans.

No interest.

He decided on the style of the house by himself, engaged a contractor, and the work began.

No interest.

Every day he reported the progress on her house, finally announcing that it was all finished. Wouldn't she like to come and see it?

No interest.

With the help of the children and the neighbors, he packed up all their belongings to move into their new home.

No interest.

The movers came in and carried over every stick of their possessions, except the bed upon which the wife lay. Alone with the echoes, in that stripped and empty house, she continued to be indifferent.

For the last time, her husband came to plead with her to get up; and upon her renewed refusal, he announced he was going to get the axe and chop down the bed.

The legs went first, then the foot board, but when he started

hacking about her head, she leaped from beneath the covers, fled down the stairs, out of the house, and across the yard in her nightgown. When she reached the safety of her new home she was a cured woman, and it lasted, it may be noted, to the end of her days.

It was a lucky woman who had a hired girl to help her with the housework, but competent girls were scarce. All of them expected three dollars for the seven days of work each week, and to be treated as a member of the family. They ate with the family, and sat with them in the living room, and the aggravations from such an arrangement might totally outweigh any conveniences.

The neighbors kept close watch on all of her household activities. They came by the front door and by the back door. If they helped with a sickness or with a party, they got a chance to peek in cupboards and bureau drawers.

They knew to the minute when the scrub water was thrown out after cleaning the kitchen floor; when the dusting of the parlor was finished and the shades went down again; and when her washing was hung out on the line.

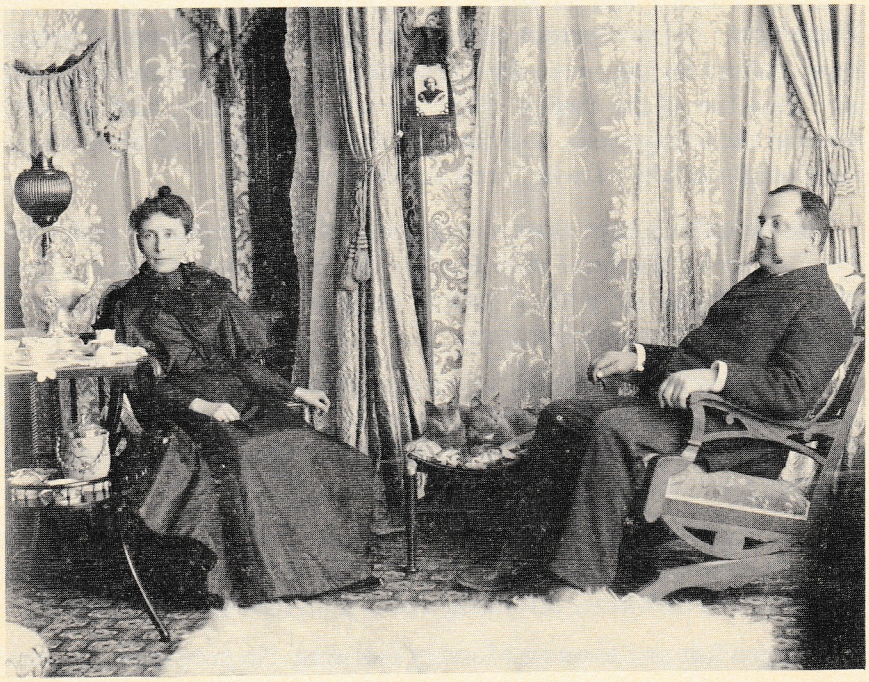
In decent weather, wash day was the neighborhood sporting event, a dead race to be the first to get the laundry hung on the line in the yard. The winner felt smug about it all the rest of the week.

It began fair and even on Monday morning. No preparations could be started the day before, because that was Sunday, the Day of Rest.

Mrs. Remington was the champion of her end of town because she stayed up all Sunday night. On the last stroke of midnight, she and her daughter leaped into action. By dawn, all their washing was out on the line, and the Remington ladies were ready for bed. The neighbors all failed to beat that.

It was the callers, however, that were the test of the true mettle of a housewife. They arrived at any hour of the day, and since it was an unwritten social law that a woman must look presentable when she answered her door, there were times when this was difficult. So, many a woman who did her own housework went about her morning duties wearing three aprons, one over the others. The topmost, the “pot apron”, was a heavy material to take the brunt of the cooking and scrubbing. The one under it was ordinary but clean, in case she

had a minute to sit down and do some sewing or mending. The third, at the bottom, was a “good” one, to be whipped into sight if the minister should chance to call.



A Fairbury parlor. Note the antimacassar.

The apron was such a convenience. Besides protecting the clothing beneath, it was useful to lift hot pans, do a bit of hasty dusting, dry hands, wrap around a baby in an emergency, and wipe a nose. They could even spit on a corner to clean a smudge from a child’s cheek, or use the whole of it to cover their own face in times of grief or embarrassment.

Of course, the logical time for calling was in the afternoon, and so, directly the dinnertime chores were finished, the ladies of a household donned clean dresses and “good” white aprons, and betook themselves to the sitting room with their embroidery or tatting. If someone important came, they adjourned to the parlor.

Each proper caller, as she departed, laid her card, a dainty thing with her name engraved upon it, in the silver dish on the hallway

The Easterners had brought the calling and various other social niceties from their former homes, and while there were villagers who jeered, there were others who were grateful for the pattern of a stable community.

The undisputed social queen of Fairbury was Mrs. John Taylor who was aided by her daughters. As a family, they were educated, cultured, and widely traveled in Europe, and with the wealth from real estate and banking to maintain their position.

There were other people from Maine who made Fairbury their home - the Remingtons, Stackpoles and Hempsteads - Collectively, they were known as “the Down East Aristocrats.” At first they were held in esteem, in spite of their supercilious manners, and it was felt they “gave the town tone”.

All of the Down East Aristocrats lost their money. John Taylor was caught in the Panic, and his ruin was complete. Nothing was left except the home which was in his wife’s name, and Taylor, unable to endure the anxiety and humiliation, committed suicide.

Nevertheless, a vigorous social life had evolved around them. Hostesses vied with each other in the giving of their teas, receptions, bridge parties and what not, and some of the liveliest of the social rivalries were between sisters-in-law. Numerous clubs were also formed to suit their varied interests and for the purpose of improving their minds. It was all very stimulating.

There was one rebel against all the popular demands on housewives, however, and they spoke of her with voices muted with horror.

Mrs. Scriven was an intellectual woman and a writer, herself, of magazine articles, but the tales about the state of her own home, specifically of her kitchen, are extant even yet, for she abominated dishwashing and all that went with it. Not only did she never wash a pan or dish as long as the supply held out, but neither did she bother to scrape or stack them. As the supreme offense, her glass china cabinet, that sacred article of furniture used by all proper housekeepers in their dining rooms for the prominent display of cut glass and hand-painted china, she used to store her iron skillets.

Her husband did various things about town, but he was especially popular with the Fairbury men who shipped livestock by railroad. They liked to have him travel with their shipments, for, in those days, there were no laws to compel an engineer to stop so that animals in transit could be watered, and a trip might end with a good many of them dead. George Scriven never had any trouble about this, because whenever he wanted the train to wait that long, he just walked over the roofs of the cars to the engine cab and poked a pistol into the back of the engineer, who never failed to comply.

At home, the confusion never seemed to bother him, but there was one thing upon which he was adamant: he insisted upon a nice cup for his breakfast coffee. Consequently, every few months, Mrs. Scriven would board the train for Chicago, and all the town would know that she was on the way to buy another set of Haviland china.

Her children were similar to those of Charles Dicken's famous Mrs. Jellyby, who was so preoccupied with the state of the heathen in Africa that her own grew up the best they could. Mrs. Scriven's son, Ray, in particular, was free from the restrictions that hampered the lives of other boys; and what a good neighbor said when she came into the Scriven living room and found the mother peacefully reading, while Ray finished hacking a big hole there in the wall, through the laths and plaster, into the dining room, had best be left to the imagination. Years later, when Ray had grown to a young man and killed Amos Brown, a Fairbury policeman, and fled into safety, the head noddings, and "I told you sos", were unanimous.

The homes of the women of Fairbury were pleasant ones, usually frame construction, characterized by the elaborate "gingerbread" decorations of the period. They were set in wide lawns among shade trees, and every yard had a fence around it. Most of them were white picket, although there were a few of them of iron, or hedge. Another kind were low, of parallel boards, with a flat board running along the top, a wonderfully comfortable seat. The fences were there by virtue of being needed for the protection of the children and property, for wandering or runaway animals were numerous, and packs of stray dogs roamed the streets.

Just outside the fence gate, abutting the street, was a hitching post and "stepping block". The latter was a convenience for getting into the high buggies, or mounting saddle horses. It consisted of two

steps made of stone, with the flat side of the block facing the street.

The streets themselves were dirt, but were lined their whole length with green tunnels of overarching trees that became a blaze of glory in the autumn.

Most of the private walks, as well as the public ones, were made of boards, although a few of the wealthier citizens had flagstones to their doors. There was only a little shrubbery close to the houses, and practically no foundation planting. A few perennial plants and hardy bushes out in the yard were about the extent of any landscaping. Shade trees were set out by the owners, and a planting of cedars about a residence was popular. Sometimes the lower branches of the cedars were left untrimmed, and grew to produce a rich gloom inside the house, which was considered very elegant and desirable.

Then, back of every house, along the alley were the barn, woodshed, and perhaps a chicken coop.

A privy stood a short distance back of the house, and was painted the same color. The path leading to it was made with the ashes from the stoves, and usually the woodpile was beside the path, so that one trip could serve a double purpose.

The common privy size was a “three holer”, one of them being of reduced size and built lower than the others to fit the smaller youngsters. There were no windows, but there were ventilators up near the roof. Diamonds and crescents were the popular shapes for these. The door opened in, so it could be pushed shut with a foot if someone came, and there was a box for the corn cobs and a nail for the catalogue.

If an artistic effect was desired, morning glories were planted to climb over it, but whatever pleasing touches were given to it, the experienced privy owner saw to it that it was firmly anchored. Heavy boards running from the top of the building were driven straight down five feet into the ground. They might be pulled out, but never upset, a matter of no little importance on Hallowe’en. One of the favorite exploits of the youths on that night was to find an occupied privy and upset it, door down. Escape was impossible, and the only hope of the luckless prisoner was to be able to yell loud enough to bring help.

The roof of nearly every residence carried lightning rods, and in the case of a storm, the first duty of some member of the family was to run out with a bucket of water to pour around the ground wires.

These lightning rods were a common business racket of the period, and some salesmen who came to Fairbury sold them “by the rod”. When they were installed, the length of the ground wires, measured in rods, was the means whereby they calculated their bill.

Every house had a porch, the outdoor living room of the family during the warm weather. They were delightful places, with their climbing vines, porch swing, and cushioned rocking chairs. Some of them were quite large, not only to hold a lot of people, but also to make it possible to move the chairs out of the sun and catch a breeze.

Lacking any kind of air conditioning, in hot weather the housekeeping chores were done as early in the morning and as quickly as possible. Then the windows and doors were closed, and the blinds were drawn to keep out the sun, and the ladies took their handwork to the front porch to enjoy the fine weather, the singing of the birds, and the sights along the street.

People walked in those days, both for business and pleasure, and for the mail which came in twice a day. Couples had the pleasant custom of just “going for a walk” on a fine evening or a Sunday afternoon, and boys whistled as they came down the street.

(It was not proper for a female to whistle. “A whistling girl and a crowing hen, will surely come to some bad end.”)

The pedestrians often had time to stop and visit a bit with the friends out on their porches. There was always an extra palm leaf fan for the newcomer to cool himself and help keep the flies and mosquitoes away.

Fans like these were laid along the church pews on Sunday morning. Most of them were furnished by John P. Cook, the local undertaker, whose name was discreetly displayed thereon. It was an act of good public relations by a kindly man, and it was greatly appreciated by the sweltering congregations.

Lemonade was a favorite refreshment to serve their thirsty callers, and sometimes, if the ice supply was low, they used the

power of suggestion instead. A little extra work with the pump handle to get the water as cold as possible, and a couple of silver napkin rings in the pitcher to produce cheerful clinking, were almost as good.

As soon as warm weather definitely arrived, the ice wagon began its rounds. It was horse drawn, of course, and its load was protected by a piece of canvas. It made its regular circuit of the village streets, the north side of town one day, the south side on the following. At each house with the cardboard sign in a front window indicating the number of pounds desired, the ice man stopped, uncovered one of the big blocks of ice, chipped off the right amount, and washed away the remaining flecks of sawdust with a hose attached to a tank of water on the side of his wagon. Then he weighed the chunk on the scales hanging above the tail gate, and carried it into the house with his big pair of tongs.

The neighborhood children swarmed over the wagon and picked up the ice chips to eat, even from the dirt; and on very hot days the ice man would do a lot of extra chipping for them, and sometimes he even gave them a big piece for their own.

The early settlers had kept their milk and butter in a tin bucket down the well in hot weather. Later on, someone invented an elaborate and more convenient tin contraption with shelves and a door, which was put on the market. Ice, however, was always a great luxury for them, and in case of sickness it could be a necessity, and so a few people prepared their own ice and packed it in sawdust in small ice houses at their own homes.

Conrad Munz built the first big commercial ice house in Fairbury. In the middle of winter, after a prolonged cold spell, the ice at the sand pit was tested to see if it had reached the desired ten-inch thickness. Deeper than that made it too hard to handle. Seventy men and a horse were required for the ice harvest. The horse pulled the ice cutter, which was a special kind of saw, to cut the ice into strips, and then into pieces about two feet square. As the blocks broke away from the ledge, they were floated to a conveyor on the bank and carried to the ice house, where they were stacked, and packed in sawdust to help make the hot weather endurable.

With all the families out on their porches and visible, it was harvest time for the peddlers, and they sold everything under

heaven, it seemed.

The umbrella mender came annually, as did the scissors grinder. The latter carried a little grindstone, and sharpened all their knives and scissors. They worked on the back steps, with the children crowding close to watch.

Then, every few days, there were the tramps, for, with the unsettled conditions which followed the Civil War, the bonanza of the California gold fields, new railroads, and new territories opening up for farms, many men went roaming. They came through the town, as many as twenty a day, dirty, ragged, begging for food and clothing, and occasionally molesting the women. Numerous small thefts and burglaries were attributed to them, and it was thought that they had been responsible for some of the early fires. The Fairbury men had formed a vigilante committee, and the Village Board passed an ordinance whereby any person who could not properly account for himself was either run out of town or jailed. During one winter alone, there were one-hundred and fifty tramps housed in the local jail, and the authorities had to do a thorough housecleaning, come spring.

Most of the vagabonds came to the back door after meal time and asked for food, but a few of the better class of tramps offered to do light work in return, such as splitting wood or stacking a wood pile.

For the most part, they were brutal-looking specimens, and they must have given the housewives some qualms, although it was against their religious convictions to turn a hungry stranger from their door. The men reciprocated by secretly marking the house for the benefit of the brethren who followed.

Their “jungle” was near the Eastern town limits where the railroad crossed the creek. Discarded railroad ties made good firewood, and the bridge gave them shelter. Also, for secure hiding places, there were the mines nearby.

There were wandering tribes of gypsies, too, who habitually camped along the creek. They traded horses, told fortunes, and stole everything that was loose.

During the summer, meals for the household were a real burden, and much of the cooking was moved into the summer kitchen, which was actually a part of the wood shed standing a little back from the

house. It contained a work table and cook stove where the baking was done, meals cooked, and the seasonal canning accomplished. It kept the heat and mess out of the house, and simplified summer living.

Sometimes their gardens were so bountiful that it seemed as if they spent the whole of the summer preparing the produce for winter.

Early morning and the cool of the evening were the favorite hours to work in them. There were many vacant lots between the houses, and most of these were utilized, although some were overgrown with weeds. The gardens were neatly kept and beautiful, with the plots of vegetables bordered in bright flowers and little paths between them. Gooseberry and currant bushes were at the far side, together with the feathery green of the asparagus bed, and the great, ornate leaves of the row of rhubarb. “Pie plant”, they called it. There were table grapes on trellises and along the fences, and maybe some for home made wine; and, scattered everywhere over the whole place, were the fruit trees: apple, cherry, apricot, pear.

The main part of the garden work was done by the men, and the neighborhood rivalry was keen. It was a proud family who could sit down to a Fourth of July dinner of fried chicken, new potatoes and fresh peas.

Since gardens meant harvest, harvest meant preserving, and that, again, was a project for the whole family.

The men and boys gathered the fruit and vegetables, and the women and girls peeled and cooked them. As the jars were filled, cooled, labeled, and ready to be stored, it was the men, again, who carried them to the basement.

Apples, peaches, and apricots were popular for drying, and these put into cloth sacks with sassafrass bark to keep out the bugs.

The peach and apple butters were made without spices, and took prolonged cooking, with constant stirring. They were cooked down so rich and thick that they were stored in the cellar in stone jars and kept perfectly that way for months.

The strawberry, cherry, grape, quince, peach, and rhubarb jams and jellies all required pound for pound of fruit and sugar. Each

batch that went on the fire was tended with meticulous care, because it not only was a candidate for a Fairbury Fair blue ribbon prize money, but it also faced the judgment of other cooks at socials and parties, as well as the guests in the home. Preserves were judged by the plumpness and color of the fruit.

Cherries made famous eating, either as jam, “sauce”, or in pies, but they were so small they took time unto eternity itself to gather, and then seed them. The latter was a particularly loathed and messy job because they were so juicy. The stuff dripped off the victims’ sticky elbows, filling the bottom of her pan, where it mixed with the seeds and wormy cherries. The wormy cherries could always be identified by the peculiar “squishing” sound they made when seeded.

From the family gardens came the cucumber pickles, mustard, dill and sweet, mixed vegetable pickle, chow chow, piccalilli, chili sauce and catsup. Plain vegetables were cold packed by setting the mason jars on a rack in a wash boiler, covering them with water, and boiling them for a prescribed length of time. Meat was fixed the same way.

Sweet corn was boiled, cut from the cob, and dried on a cloth in the sun while covered by a mosquito netting to keep out the flies.

Then, with the canning well out of the way and school in session again, it was time for cleaning house.

This befell each domicile twice a year, spring and fall. In the one instance, they put up the heating stoves; in the other, they took them down.

It was a process whereby the whole house was turned upside down and inside out, so that no man had a place to sit and rest a moment. For that matter, he was busy housecleaning, too.

His particular part of the work, besides the stoves, was the moving of furniture; cleaning the cellar and the barn; and the taking up and the relaying of the heavy, room-sized Brussels carpets. His son, provided he had one the right size, had been previously sentenced to beat them; but it took mature judgment, and experience, not to mention a strong back, to get them down again.

Since the best carpets were of thick wool, the shrillest outcries

evoked during housecleaning season were from the discovery that the moths had got into them. They were usually under the heavier, seldom moved pieces of furniture, and they called for instant action to kill them, eggs and all. Before laying the carpet again, salt and pepper were thoroughly rubbed into it all around the edges as a preventive.

Bedroom closets and drawers were turned out, with close inspection for moths. Winter clothing was either taken out and aired, or packed away in newspapers and moth balls, both of which the moths disliked. Bed clothes were washed and hung on the line, and on a fine day when the quilts were sunning, it seemed that the whole neighborhood was filled with the glory of banners snapping in the wind.

The lace window curtains came down, were washed, and then fitted to the big wooden stretchers which stood on the porch for drying.

In springtime, the removal of the heating stoves was a matter of solemn calculation in weather signs, and consultation with the almanac. Once down, there was no heat in the house, except in the kitchen, and a prolonged, unseasonable cold spell could cause severe discomfort, especially to those afflicted with rheumatism.

Stove pipes were the particular problem here, and woe to the man who failed to handle them with sufficient care. After a heavy winter's use, they were filled with black, oily soot which clung stubbornly to everything it touched, and a dropped pipe scattered it generously throughout the room.

In the fall, the base burners were simply set back up.

Once the stove problem was out of the way, the housewife, with her helpers went through her home like an army. Her hair was covered with a mob cap, and her clothing with a heavy apron. She was equipped with a pail, a ladder, lye soap and scrub rags, and a long-handled broom to reach her twelve foot ceilings.

The cellar came first, with the men and boys to help carry. In spring, the leftover jars of canned fruit and vegetables were sorted over, the spoiled ones emptied and washed. The shelves were scrubbed down, and fresh newspapers were laid on them. The apple barrels and bins were cleaned out. The big stone jars that had held

lard, pickles, sausage and apple butter during the winter were freshly scrubbed and put out to sun, and all was made ready for a new supply of food.

The attic was attacked next, then the bedrooms, and finally the living room and kitchen. By this time, the whole house smelled of wet wood and yellow soap.

The housewife regarded her housecleaning as a major accomplishment, and it certainly was. No wonder, what with all the scrubbing, beating, polishing, washing, and moving furniture about, everyone in the whole family was prostrate with exhaustion afterwards.

Even the regular weekly cleaning was a serious business. The village streets were unpaved, and the dust was thick. To cope with it, a woman had a feather duster, a broom and a dustpan.

She used great care in sweeping a carpet, to stir the dust as little as possible. Shredded wet newspapers were scattered first to dampen it a little, and there was a trick in the movement of the broom. She began at the outer edges of the room, sweeping towards the center, slowly going around and around, until the dirt was in a neat little pile in the middle, ready to be gathered into the dustpan. Then she dusted the furniture. It was high; it was heavy; and it was full of curlicues. Dusting had to be done carefully, or skipped places would be all too noticeable.

The “sitting room”, as they always called it, had a clock upon a shelf, perhaps of the astronomical or the calendar variety, and a library table, which was covered with an embroidered “runner”. It held books, magazines, and the tall kerosene reading lamp with a richly decorated glass shade and base.

The easy chairs, especially those favored by the men of the family, invariably wore an antimacassar, or tidy, where the head of the occupant rested.

The pioneer men had favored bear grease for grooming their hair, particularly if they had killed the bear. The grease, however, grew rancid with age, and became a reminder that the bear was long gone.

Consequently, with the coming of civilization, the sweeter

So, they called it an Anti-Macassar. Right?

Several of the Fairbury homes were illuminated by artificial gas which was generated by a machine buried out in the back yard. This required some skill to operate, and there was a distinct possibility of it blowing up. The chandeliers of these lights branched down from the high ceilings, with the flames protected by glass globes, some beautifully designed and etched. They were lit and regulated by the means of a long pole designed for that purpose, but in some of the rooms, particularly those in the cellar, they were mere open jets on a wall. These were a dangerous fire hazard, and men, momentarily careless, sometimes set their own beards ablaze.

A reporter covering social events in these homes after the installation, invariably spoke of "the glare of the gas lights".

When electricity came into general use in the homes, in 1890, the gas lights and the ornate kerosene reading lamps were made obsolete overnight. The new lights were but a single bare bulb which hung from the middle of the ceiling by a cord; and since there were no doorside switches, one came into a dark room to grope until he found the bulb in mid-air, and turned it on.

The sitting rooms of Fairbury were cheerful ones, fitted to a busy family life. Parlors, on the other hand, were kept for "best", and they were intended to impress the visitors. The Victorian furniture there was of massive black walnut, some of it ceiling high. It was covered with inlaid woods and jig saw carving, knobs and scroll work, and it was the devil's own to dust. The chairs and sofa were sometimes upholstered with horsehair, stark black, and of a treacherous slipperiness, but, as hideous as some of it was, it was of quality wood and workmanship, and was intended to be used by succeeding generations.

The housewife did not casually experiment with furniture groupings. Furniture, in a Victorian home, was bought to fill a given space, and, once set down, was intended to stay there.

The parlor carpet was brightly floral. The fireplace was black marble, spotlessly clean, and covered with a hand-embroidered screen. There was a clock on the shelf above it, aloof beneath a dome of glass, and perhaps another dome of a small table holding an arrangement of artificial flowers, or a pair of stuffed birds. There was sure to be a piano or a melodeon; and heavy lace curtains, crackling with starch, at all the windows.

The pictures in this room were big portraits copied in charcoal from daguerreotypes, in heavy walnut frames. They were characterized by their sternness of expression, for the taking of a photograph in those days was business of importance and infrequent occurrence. The subjects assumed all the dignity they could manage, considering a smile to be unseemly frivolity. The very stands that gripped their heads and held them immovable throughout the process, had been grim reminders of the seriousness of the occasion. In addition, some of the subjects gave a peculiar awfulness to their portraits by staring into the lens of the camera, so that their enlarged photographs hanging on the parlor wall, seemed to glare straight at every occupant of the room.

Like the parlors, the bedrooms were filled with black walnut, heavily carved. The headboard of the bed was ceiling high, and in winter a feather mattress billowed beneath gay quilts and pillow shams. It was quite a trick to make such a bed, and fluff the feathers to provide maximum comfort and warmth for each of the occupants; and the first thing they did upon arising, was to throw the covers back over the foot of it to air. During the daytime nobody ever sat upon a bed. It wrinkled the spread. Besides, it wasn't mannerly. Beds were strictly for sleeping and sickness.

The dresser was no dainty thing, but a mighty arrangement of deep drawers and a heavy mirror. In case there was no closet, a tremendous wardrobe occupied one side of the room. The wash stand, also of walnut and marble, was another. It had a rack of towels, and a set of decorated china: a pitcher, a bowl, mug and night vessel; and above it hung a "splasher", an exquisite thing of drawn work and embroidery, to keep the splatters of soapsuds from marring the wallpaper.

Children and guests occupied the upstairs bedrooms, but for convenience, the one for the parents was downstairs, often adjoining the living room. It was the room which the family used in case of sickness; and with a serious illness, it was an absolute necessity.

There were few bathrooms in the early town, and the first to appear were rooms converted from another purpose, with all the pipes exposed naked to the view. The lavatory had a marble top. The bathtub was stark white, but long and deep, and it stood a good six inches from the floor on claw feet. The toilet had an overhead tank, and when flushed, the roar of water reverberated throughout the house.

During the Spanish-American War some of those toilets bore a sign:

"Remember the Maine,
and pull the chain."

Where bathroom space was limited, a "wardrobe bathtub" was popular. This was a folding tub in a golden oak case, which stood upright in a corner when not in use. It was zinc lined, and had a gasoline heater. If the rubber stopper was lost, it could be plugged with a corn cob. One species of these oaken tubs had a hinged flap covering the top, "forming a lounge or bedstead where room space is of consequence."

The dining room of the household was always a full-sized room, and it was used three times a day, for it was not respectable to eat in the kitchen, except in an emergency.

The table was a sturdy one standing in the center of the room, with the family chairs pushed beneath it, the father's at the head, and the mother's at the foot. The table itself was always the extension type, which could be pulled out the length of the room to accommodate a good many guests, and above it hung the adjustable kerosene light with a glass shade.

A glass china cabinet displayed the choicer dishes and hand-painted china, and a large sized side-board held the silverware. The pictures for this room often had been executed by the lady of the house, or her daughters, and they were generally still life copies of fruit or game; or a framed needlework motto, such as "God Bless Our Home", or "Home Sweet Home". Sometimes a wire plant stand, built in tiers, and with brackets to hold additional pots of flowers, stood in a sunny window and it made the whole room especially cheery.

A door opened from the dining room into the kitchen, the strong-hold of the house. It was a large room by modern standards because it was intended for family living, and the fragrance of cooking hung over it like a benediction.

It did little, however, to lighten a woman's labors. The bare boards of the floor were partly covered with a couple of rag rugs, and some women scrubbed their kitchen floor on their hands and knees after dinner every day except Sunday.

An advertisement of the time depicted a low platform on wheels, upon which the housewife could kneel to do her scrubbing. In front of her, as she worked, was a rack to hold an open book, so that she need waste no opportunity to improve her mind.

The kitchen had a dado, a waist-high wooden paneling around the walls built to receive the hard knocks and spare the plaster. The narrow board which finished off the top of this made a splendid dirt catcher and runway for the mice.

For furniture, she had a good-sized, stout pine work table, a cupboard with tin paneled doors decorated with a pierced design, and, if she was lucky, a small sink encased with wood, which had a pump at one end. A wooden bench near the door held a water pail and dipper, tin wash basin, and a dish with a bar of homemade soap, where the men washed up before meals. Above it hung a small mirror, roller towel, and a shelf with a comb and shaving mug. In summer, the bench, with its equipment, was placed outside the kitchen door where it was cooler and more convenient.

In addition, there were a couple of straight backed chairs and a cushioned rocker: a shelf with a gay ruffle around it for the clock, and the almanac hung from it by a nail; growing plants in the windows; the rag rugs on the floor; a wooden spice box with drawers; and a match holder on the wall near the stove.

A kerosene barn lantern hung on its hook by the door, and iron wall brackets held kerosene lamps in strategic places. Sometimes a lamp was suspended by an iron chain from the ceiling over the work table, and was adjustable in height. Every morning, every lamp and lantern in the house that had been used was brought into the kitchen

to be refilled, the wicks trimmed, and the chimneys washed and polished.

The space on the back porch next to the door was reserved for the wooden ice box. It was metal lined, and had a lid on top which tilted back to receive the big chunk of ice. Below this was a door opening on two or three small shelves for food. A drip pan to catch the water from the melting ice was placed beneath the ice box, and this had to be emptied regularly.

Staple food supplies were purchased in quantity, and were kept in the pantry just off the kitchen. This was never a large room, but the floor-to-ceiling shelves and an extra table gave a great deal of storage space. There was a barrel of flour, wooden buckets with lids for sugar, and big stone jars for lard, as well as the cake and bread boxes, and the cookie jar. Dishes of cooked food were set in there to await the next meal, and one could always find a bite to eat. Therefore, some of the more frugal housewives kept their pantries locked between meals.

The chief feature of the kitchen, the all-important range, was made of black cast iron, which had to be polished regularly, and the blacking was hard on the hands.

The top of the stove had four round stove lids which could be removed with the lifter, and since the connecting sections were also removable, the cook could take off the entire top to accommodate a giant griddle, or in the case the stove needed a thorough cleaning.

A deep drawer for the ashes, and a small door for adding fuel, were to the left of the oven, and a tank of several gallon capacity for heating water was on the far right. The high back of the range was also of iron, and the stovepipe went up the front of it, to turn into the chimney hole at the top. The warming ovens, with little doors that pulled down, were above, on either side of this stove pipe; and sometimes a piece of sheet iron was put in back of the stove to prevent the wall paper behind it from scorching.

The legs of the stove lifted it a foot or so off the floor, and since the iron remained warm long after the fire had gone out, it was the most popular spot in the house for the family dog and cat. In the cold days of early spring, it was a wonderful place to put boxes containing baby chicks or pigs or lambs, and the fact that they sometimes managed to get out and dirty the kitchen was beside the point, as far as the men were concerned.

point, as far as the men were concerned.

Cooking on a cast iron range was by no flick of the switch. The housewife had to allow herself time to shake the ashes out of the firebox, which usually filled the ash drawer so full she had to take it out and empty it. There were added to a special little pile which was not far from the back door.

Next, she had to crumple a newspaper, put it in the stove, lay a little kindling over it and put a match to it. Once it was flaming, she fed in the kindling and coal until she had a nice fire going and the stove began to get hot. Each stove had its own peculiarities to get it to draw and heat properly, which she had to learn by trial and error, and a fine cook was apt to know her stove better than she knew her own husband.

There were no thermostats to regulate the temperature of the oven, but a good cook could instantly guess the correct temperature by thrusting her hand into it. A less experienced woman used a piece of paper, and judged the heat by the length of time it took it to turn brown.

Cooking in the pots and frying pans on top of the stove, was regulated according to their position. For a quick boil, the pot was moved to the left of the stove over the firebox. Perhaps a stove lid was removed to put it directly over the flame, and a few more cobs were thrown on the fire. Pushed to the right, over the oven, the pot simmered quietly; and things stayed hot on the back of the stove.

The cook was constantly on the alert to keep the vicinity of the range clean. Every renewal of fuel was followed by a few strokes around the floor with the broom and the dustpan, which stood within quick reach, and the top of her stove was kept free from scattered ashes by a dried turkey wing. It was kept on top of her warming oven, along side the little box of clean broom straws used for cake testing.

It was the job of the men and boys to keep the coal bucket and wood box filled, and whenever a woman saw the cat sleeping on the back of it, she always sent her boys out to bring in an extra supply of fuel for the fires, because she knew it was going to storm. If the cat slept with its paws in the air, there would be a big change in the weather. If it sat with its back to the fire, snow was forthcoming; and if it washed its face in winter, there would be a thaw.

The women not only baked their own breads, coffee cakes and biscuits, but at least two kinds of pie and cake were on their tables twice a day, and a filled cookie jar was standard equipment.

Some of the things they made were deceptively simple: an Angel Food cake, for instance.

Now an Angel Food cake requires nearly a dozen eggs, the whites only. (The yolks took a little ingenuity to use afterwards, and they usually appeared as mayonnaise or a Sunshine cake.)

The whites were measured and put on a large platter. Then they were beaten gently by hand with a wire whisk to an exact degree of stiffness. The sugar and flour, previously sifted together several times, was lightly shaken over the egg white, just a little at a time, and carefully folded in with the whisk. When all was combined, it was consigned to the oven with a prayer. One cob too many spelled disaster.

Using that number of eggs after the famine of the winter made it an important cake. Therefore, it was popular with the ladies for their parties and church socials, and it definitely required that certain touch to produce a good one. Any woman, not having it, was chary of being required to make an Angel Food for any social occasion. Mrs. Frank McDowell, a distraught co-hostess for a Ladies' Aid meeting, made four of them in one morning before she produced one fit to serve. What she did with all those yolks she had left, was never mentioned.

Every good cook had her specialties which she kept secret, and family recipes were handed down from mother to daughter. There were no standard measurements, and exact amounts were not given, even in the published cook books. Instead, a recipe called for a "heaping" or a "scant" cup of this or that, and the cup itself might be either a tea or coffee cup, which was another difference. They said a "pinch" of something, and a "wineglass" of something else. How big a wine glass? Tablespoons were "Heaping"; "Add enough flour to make a thin batter" or a "stiff dough"; "sweeten to taste", or "season to taste"; "cut pieces the size of a pigeon's egg"; and "cook to notion".

The honors of a good cook were hard won, and they were thoroughly deserved.

Her equipment to do all this was simple. The skillets and cooking pots were iron, and they were cleaned by a scouring pad six inches or so square, made of small iron rings. This was used with lye soap. Her pie pans and crocks were of yellow earthenware, brown-glazed inside, and the crocks had heavy wire handles. Brass buckets of varying sizes were used to make jelly and apple butter. They were kept polished with vinegar and salt.

They were adequate to produce tasty results, and with the coming of the frosts the kitchen became a hive of activity.

In fact, the whole house seemed to shrink towards it. The process began when the hammock and double seated wooden lawn swing were taken to the barn, and the rocking chairs carried back inside the house.

As the cold deepened, the housewives began to shut off rooms, as there were no water pipes to freeze. The upstairs bedrooms, where the children slept, were the first to be closed, and the only heat up there for the rest of the winter was through the register in the ceiling of the room below. In really bitter weather, even these had to be closed to keep the living quarters comfortable.

The parlor was second to be shut off. There was not so much company in winter, and besides it saved that much cleaning.

Out in the kitchen the fire in the cook stove was going all day long, and it was the center of action. A pot of pumpkin bubbled on it, cooking until it was tender enough to be mashed through the collander. Then it was returned to the stove and cooked down until very thick, and then made into little flat pats which were dried in the warming oven of the stove. These were stored in sacks, and were soaked in water before using.

Mincemeat, simmering on the back of the range, filled the room with steam rich with spices. This product involved child labor, for the apples had to be chopped in a big wooden bowl. Moreover, every single raisin that went into it and the fruit cakes was seeded by hand, since a seedless raisin was far in the future. It was sticky work, and aggravated by the fact that the laborers were required to whistle throughout their chore lest they eat up the raisins as fast as they prepared them.

Some of the housewives baked a number of mince pies at one time

and put them in a spare bedroom to freeze as that was considered to greatly enhance the flavor. They were heated in the oven before serving. The rest of the mincemeat went to the cellar in a stone jar.

The fruit cakes were stored in tin boxes with a couple of slices of apple to keep them moist.

Sauerkraut took brawn, and was considered a man's work. The cabbages were shredded on the big cutter, and then pounded down solid with a wooden mallet into a great stone jar with alternating layers of salt. It was covered with a clean white cloth and a plate was put over it, which was weighted with a heavy rock. The first fermentation was a particularly odorous one, but the end results were worth it.

After the cold weather had settled down in earnest, the men prepared the winter supply of meat. The choicer parts were smoked, and left to hang in the smoke house. The rest, including the sausage, was fried, packed into jars, covered with lard, and stored in the basement.

When the harvest was all completed, the long shelves of jars filled, the bins of vegetables, and the barrels of apples and potatoes filled to the brim, there was no satisfaction in the world equal to that of going downstairs to look them over, and pick up a few cans of this and that for supper.

Breakfast was at seven, dinner at twelve noon, and supper at six o'clock. The whole family was expected to be present, and on the minute, with their hands and faces clean.

Directly the family had taken their seats, everyone folded his hands, and bowed his head while the father said Grace. Then they watched while he unfolded his napkin, picked up his carving knife to give it a couple of flicks along the whetstone of his carving set, and proceeded to serve them all. Men took pride in their carving skill.

Full-sized white linen table cloths were used at every meal, and the white linen napkins were always rolled, and placed in the individual napkin rings before the owners left the table. Some of the shiftless housewives changed these on certain days, and not too often, but the careful ones put in clean ones as needed.

For ordinary family meals, all the food was put on the table at the beginning, so that the men and boys could accurately proportion

their capacity, and not feel cheated in case a favorite dessert appeared later.

Conversation was general throughout the meal, but children were never permitted to interrupt or monopolize it. They ate what was set before them and they cleaned their plates, for it was a sin to waste food.

Company was a special matter, for then the children had to wait for the “second table”, wrestling with the pangs of hunger the best they might, while smelling all the good things cooking, and then listening to the laughter and conversation of their elders out in the dining room. All the while, they were not too sure that when their turn to eat finally did come, the only chicken left would be the backs and necks, unless there was a compassionate relative in the kitchen to slip them something better, maybe even a “wishbone” to share with a favorite cousin.

The mistress of the house also took pride in the dishes she used to serve her meals.

Cakes stood upon elegant glass stands, and they made a notable ornament in themselves. Celery, another decorative touch, was put, tops and all, into special vase-shaped dishes. Teaspoons, for the table, were together in one glass holder, and were passed as needed. The colored glass pickle dishes had silver covers and stands, with little silver tongs hanging from the handle. Butter dishes were covered, too, and had a compartment in the bottom for crushed ice to keep the butter from liquifying before it could be spread. Sugar bowls were large and covered, and in the early days of Fairbury, the sugar they contained was always brown.

Her dishes had covers, not only for the purpose of keeping the food hot, but to keep the flies out of it. Little screen domes were available at the stores to cover the extra dishes. In some families, if there were guests, it was their custom for one of the daughters to stand and brush away the flies while the others ate. If there were many people at the table, there would be a girl for each end and one for the center. The whisks they used were beautiful, sometimes being made of peacock feathers.

There were no screens in the early homes, but even after they became common, the flies were so numerous that swatting them

was hopeless. They gathered in swarms on the screens of the open kitchen doors, drawn by the smell of the cooking, and every person who went in or out admitted a fresh cloud of them. Fringed newspapers tacked along the top of screen doors fluttered when they were opened, and so brushed away a few, but it was the flypaper which was the main weapon of the housewife's defense. It came in sticky sheets, which were laid in strategic places where the most flies seemed to gather, and ribbons of the stuff were hung from the ceilings. Care had to be used or one would blunder into them in the dark. Household pets had to be watched, too, because a frantic animal, even though small and with all four feet stuck fast, could cause chaos in a pantry or upon a laden table.

Meals were bountiful, and it was considered shameful to cook just enough of anything. There had to be such an abundance that some was left over, but nothing was ever wasted. These odds and ends of food went into the pantry, and from thence they were warmed over, or went into hash or the soup pot. Extra pieces of bread made dressing or bread pudding.

It was not only that the meals were abundant and tasted so good, but it was the personal pride of every person around the table, that he had helped produce nearly everything they had to eat. Chores were real, and the family had to work together, or do without. The labors were well rewarded, and gave a sense of security and accomplishment. If a boy had to hoe the garden and bug the potatoes, milk and tend the cow, he received meals which were lavish with thick cream and homemade butter.

So, it was only natural that children were taught to respect food, and were never permitted to waste it. They were required to eat the fruit that had begun to spoil, nibbling around the brown spots. This was particularly true in the case of the barrel of winter apples, and there were children who never had a whole good apple until they were grown up.

In addition to the things they raised themselves, they had an abundance of game and fish. There were wild ducks and turkeys, and the squirrels made a wonderful pie. Quail was not so common, and were hunted for a special occasion, such as a Christmas dinner.

Rabbits were so plentiful that men sold them from door to door. If there was a shortage, it was easily filled, and housewives, offered a

nice fat specimen, looked first at the feet. If they had been cut off, one could be sure it was a cat.

All of the food for the family was strictly seasonal. Perishables could not be shipped, and there was no way to freeze them, but the limitations only deepened the enjoyment and sense of appreciation when they were available. Strawberries, for instance, were to be had only during the strawberry season, when they were ripening in one's own garden. They had to be tended, and they had to be picked, but they did make a most magnificent shortcake.

The mother made and served that, bringing it to the table in state after the rest of the meal had been eaten. Two great rounds of tenderest biscuit dough, still warm from the oven, were heaped upon each other with a thick layer of the crimson sugared berries between, and the whole was drenched with more berries, which made a pool of juice at the base of the cake.

As she put each portion into its bowl, she carefully spooned a share of it over the top, adding more berries from an extra bowl of them beside her. Big pitchers of rich cream for this were at each end of the table so as to reduce the interruptions for "passing".

Strawberry ice cream was another great treat, and every family made at least one freezer of it during the season. Every recipe called for many eggs, and much thick, sweet cream. The men and boys took over then, skillfully packing the freezer with salt and ice, and then turning the crank forever. This steadily grew harder and harder, until there came that magic moment when it was finished. The ice was removed until the lid was fully exposed and carefully wiped free of any salt, and then removed to extract the dasher. This was scraped, but not too thoroughly, because it belonged to the fellows who had turned it.

Was there ever anything so good as that rich, home-made ice cream luscious with fresh strawberries or tree-ripened peaches? The ladies were always certain of making money with their Ice Cream Festivals.

Strawberries were one peak in summer eating. The first fried chicken of the season was another.

Sweet corn on the cob was another event, but there was always a lot of that, and so it soon ceased to be anything special.

Out of season, they substituted the best they could. Pioneer women made pies of sorrel grass, and it was even possible to make an apple pie without apples: “To one small bowl of crackers that have been soaked until no hard parts remain, add one teaspoon Tartaric acid; sweeten to taste, add some butter and a very little nutmeg. Bake in a pie crust.”

In the early days of the town, nearly every family had a cow and the care of it was demanding. Most of them were tethered in remote corners of the yard and along the street near the house. Consequently, it was the duty of someone of the family to run out and move it at intervals. As the summer grew hotter and the grass began to turn brown, it became necessary to go farther afield, and then a group of neighbors who lacked small boys of their own, went together to hire an available urchin to pasture their cattle along the country roads. Marshall Gordon earned his money in this way, and he liked to work for Ren Dominy best of all, because Mr. Dominy paid a whole dollar for the season’s work.

Milk was delivered from house to house the year around. Even if a family had a cow, it went dry at intervals, and then it was necessary to patronize the milkman.

He arrived before breakfast, and at the sound of his little bell the housewife threw a shawl over her head and ran out to the gate with her pitcher. If she did not appear promptly, he drove on.

His milk wagon was a covered spring cart with a door on either side, and a seat inside for the driver, and his horse knew all the stops. The milk was five cents a quart, and the big two and a half gallon cans of it stood in the back of the wagon. As each customer appeared and held out her pitcher, he filled it from the can, using a pint cup as a measure. Any cleanliness there, or at his barn, was between the milkman and his conscience.

Eggs were a problem, for there was no method of preserving them, and their only way to prolong the laying season was to feed hot mash to the hens. Consequently, anyone with a few eggs to sell in winter was confident of getting a good price.

Eggs and chickens always were an important part of the economy, and the covered wagons passing through the town on their way to the newly opened land in Nebraska, had coops of chickens swinging beneath them.

Chickens were a dependable supply of fresh meat in summer emergencies, such as unexpected company. Catching one, however, was for the nimble of the family, followed by action with the hatchet and chopping block, and the headless chicken flopping around the backyard with blood and feathers flying.

Once quiet, it was carried into the kitchen and plunged into a bucket of scalding water preparatory to plucking the feathers. Sometimes the better ones were saved for pillows and feather beds.

Then the chicken was inspected for pin feathers. In the case of an older fowl, a newspaper was rolled up and lit to burn off the hairs, and then it was given a really thorough scrubbing with a brush and soap to remove all the dirt from their dust baths.

After that, it was drawn, taking particular care around the liver not to puncture the gall bladder and ruin the meat with the bitter stuff. The gizzard was emptied; the heart and bunch of tiny eggs were saved. Even the feet were used. The skin was peeled from them like stripping off a glove, and they were added to the stew pot. The excess fat was rendered and used in cooking, sometimes to make sugar cookies.

The fried chicken of early summer became roast chicken, and then stewed chicken, pressed chicken, chicken salad, chicken pie, and chicken and dumplings.

In the stew all meat became equal, but with fried or roast chickens every one in the family had his favorite piece, in order of seniority, including the liver, gizzard, and “the part that goes over the fence last”.

With the summer bounty of eggs, they also made noodles. This was a specialty of their German neighbors, and with large families to feed, it was done on a grand scale. Eggs were beaten enough to mix the yolks and whites, and then flour was added to make a stiff dough. Pieces of this were rolled into thin sheets and were spread out on papers to dry. As the work progressed, the sheets of dough began to fill the house, covering the beds and other furniture, and even some of the floors. It was important to remember their sequence in drying.

After they were ready, they were rolled into compact cylinders and were cut by hand with a sharp knife into noodles of the desired

width. The coils were shaken out, and spread once more to finish drying thoroughly before they were stored for use in the winter.

As for coffee, one afternoon of the week was devoted to its roasting. The green beans were purchased at the grocery store, and then put, single layer, in a shallow pan in the oven. They were stirred frequently until they had reached the desired shade of brown, and then were fresh ground each morning in the little hand mill.

Then, with Christmas over, the family settled down for the winter in earnest. “When the days begin to lengthen, then the cold begins to strengthen”, and the winter storms came straight from Medicine Hat.

The “head of the house” was never more so than upon a winter morning. He was the first to leave his warm bed to step with bare feet across the floor of the freezing cold room, dressed, built the fire in the kitchen range and set the tea kettle on to boil. While this was heating, he made a fire in the base burner of the sitting room.

A hard cold spell meant frozen hand pumps, indoors and out, and water froze solid in the kitchen pails. At night they had to remember to leave enough water in the teakettle to bring to a quick boil the next morning to thaw the pump. The hot water was poured into the top of it, while gently working the handle up and down, and it had to be scalding to free it.

His kitchen chores completed, he was ready to shovel his way to the barn to feed and water the livestock, and milk the cow.

The children dressed around the base burner after a desperate race through the artic hallways, the floor boards snapping with the cold at every hop. They had to restrain the tendency to crowd close to the warmth of the stove, because it was all too possible to receive a nasty burn on the backside when bending over to put on their clothes. There was no lingering in dressing on such a morning.

Any complaint of theirs about the weather was sure to bring a reminder of the pioneers. Then, their parents said, the winds had whistled through the cracks between the logs of the cabins, and in the morning the man of the house had to sweep the snow out of the room before he could build up the fire in his fireplace.

There was, they said, further, a strict etiquette about those old-

time fireplaces. Since they furnished the only heat, the chairs of the family were placed in a semi-circle before them. The best and most honorable positions, with the most comfortable chairs, were at the opposite sides next to the fireplace wall, and these were occupied by the oldest members of the family. The heat was steadier and gentler there, and they would be undisturbed by the bustling of the cook. Smaller chairs were arranged between them for the rest of the family, the older ones receiving precedence, and the married ladies over the misses. Stools for the children were used directly in front of the fire, as these were easily moved out of the way to replenish the wood or attend the cooking. Consequently, in proportion as one was placed directly in front of the fireplace, he was the most frequently disturbed, and his seat was considered inferior in rank.

By the time their own father came back into the kitchen with his pail of milk, he expected breakfast to be on the table, and his family ready to sit down with him.

They dressed and ate to cope with the cold. Their clothing was warm, and their food was substantial. Breakfast was apt to be buckwheat cakes and homemade sausage, fried eggs and potatoes, baked apples, fresh doughnuts, pie, and coffee with plenty of cream. Meat, potatoes and gravy were basic for dinner and supper at all seasons, with at least two desserts for each of them.

With the coming of bitter weather, the men moved indoors with their work and they added to the clutter of the kitchen with the small articles they were mending, the sets of harness to be cleaned and oiled, and their tools and rags. The littlest children and their playmates romped up and down the room with their toys. Through it all, around, in and out, and over the litter, stepped the cook, busy preparing the gargantuan winter meals for her family. Her stove was busy all day long. The blue enamel pot of coffee was kept hot, and the big iron tea kettle, filled and singing, was ready for whatever was needed of it, and there was a bucket of mash slowly cooking to give the chickens and cow a hot supper.

For the cook, the trips outside to the hen house or privy were an escape from bedlam. She could stop a few minutes on her porch to marvel at the glory of the world in its new fallen snow, and to draw great breaths of the tingling, clear, crisp air, and perhaps to wave at the driver of the city snow plow on his rounds.

The plow, used to clear the sidewalks of the town, was a triangle of boards with a seat on it, and it was pulled by an old horse. Sometimes, if the snowfall was especially heavy, they worked all night long. Nothing was done to the streets. Those belonged to the bobsleds and sleighs.

By mid-afternoon, when school was out, the streets were busy. Children were building snowmen and forts, or hitching rides with their sleds. The air rang with their shouts and the jingling music of the many sleigh bells. Then, with supper time approaching, starved and nearly frozen, they came straggling into the house.

Feet were warmed at the open door of the oven, and it became a welter of drying mittens, socks and stocking caps, while on the floor behind the stove, stood the homemade boot holder, of upright sticks of wood nailed to a board, to hold the rubber boots of the family, upended for more rapid drying.

In the evening, after the kitchen was straightened, the oven door was cleared of the clothing, and crocks of bread dough and the sponge for the morrow's buckwheat cakes, all covered with an immaculate old woolen blanket, were set there to rise.

Also, into the oven went the bricks to heat. These, too, were wrapped in woolen rags, and each person took one with him to bed to warm his feet.

Every Saturday night, the year around, after the supper dishes were done, and the kitchen straightened, the men built up a good fire in the stove, and filled its tank and all the pots and kettles with water to heat. The wooden tub was brought in, a rag rug laid alongside for a bath mat, and soap, towels, and wash cloths were placed on a chair within reach.

Beginning with the littlest, the children were thoroughly scrubbed down. A bath was to get clean, not just to keep clean, and no corners were overlooked. With the children in clean nightgowns and in bed, it was time for more hot water and the grownups to take their turns.

All during the winter the weekly laundry, always dreaded at best, became a nightmare, for it had to be done in the kitchen. Two big wooden tubs were placed upon a bench near the stove. One was for the suds water, the other for the rinsing, and all of it was heated on the stove.

Every drop of water for all the daily household and laundry uses had to be carried in a pail from the well outside, or at least from the pump at the kitchen sink. Only a few of the houses at first had windmills, or even cisterns, though rain barrels were commonly used to supply soft water for special purposes.

The actual washing of the clothes was done by hand upon a corrugated scrub board. Once that was finished, the next problem was to get everything dry. Hanging a wet wash outdoors in the cold was a painful business. The clothes froze stiff on the line, and it sometimes took a couple of days or so to complete the drying.

In the evenings after supper, when the coal and wood had been brought in for the following morning, the barn and hen house doors secured, and the kitchen was clean and straight, the family gathered in the sitting room around the base burner. It made soot and ashes, but it gave much warmth, and some cherished memories centered in the ruddy glow of the firelight shining behind its glass doors, while the wind howled through the cedar trees outside and the snow deepened upon the window sills.

Usually, their chairs were rockers, with a couple of footstools among them, and when the chairs were occupied and in motion, all the household pets walked with their tails held high.

Apples were brought up from the basement, nuts were cracked with a hammer and brick, and corn was popped, while the father read aloud and the mother and girls sewed or knit.

At bedtime the children undressed there before venturing into those frigid beds with their hot bricks. Even the woolen blankets and the great puffs of feather mattresses were icy cold, but at least they made the beds a lot cozier than the air in the room.

Life was made up of such little things, and the memories of them were cherished. They had to make their own fun and their own music, and their own way in life. Everybody participated. Everybody appreciated the effort that had gone into the performance of the others, and his own was appreciated in turn. They worked hard and played hard, and the periods of rest were sweet.

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